LITTLE RUSSIAN MASTERPIECES

In Four Volumes

★

Alexander Sergeyevitch Puskin
Masquerading—A Good Shot—The Snowstorm—The Queen of Spades.

Michail Yurievitch Lermontof
A Travelling Episode.

★★

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★★★★

Constantine Mikhailovitch Staniukovitch
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V. G. Korolenko
"The Slayer"—Winter.

Little Russian Masterpieces

Chosen and Translated from the Original Russian by

Zénaïde A. Ragozin

With an Introduction and Biographical Notes by

S. N. Syromiatnikof

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Stories by

Pushkin—Lermontof

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Introduction

MORE than ninety per cent. of the Russian people never read "short stories." They create them, tell them, listen to them. The popular Russian short story, is the *skaska* or fairy tale, which belongs to the province of folklore, probably the richest, most varied, wise, and clever of all folklores of Europe, having absorbed all the richest elements of the East and some of the West. But the short story in the sense in which it is understood by Americans, is the product of the journalization of literature, of the daily press, which did not develop in Russia until the seventies of the nineteenth century. The predecessor of the newspaper, the big monthly, created the "serial," the three-volume novel, usually covering the year with its twelve voluminous instalments.

Up to the eighties of the last century life

moved in the immense country at a slow pace; time was cheap, and the middle and higher classes demanded of writers either big novels or stories of some thirty to forty pages, which could be read through in the course of a long winter evening around the family samovar.

Modern Russian literature took its beginning from the great Pushkin who produced matchless examples not alone of poetry, but also of prose. He gave us our first short stories, those selected for the present set. But all that is really great in Russian literature must be sought in novels, not in stories. Until quite lately, the latter were but crumbs from the rich banquet of Russian literature. To select from these crumbs what is most typical, most beautiful, most artistic, what gives the deepest insight into the Russian national character and nature, what is finest not alone as to mastery of form, but also as to matter—such is the object of the present collection.

Russia is a deep, wide, abundant river,

slowly winding its way over the vast expanse of history. Foreigners are fascinated by its tempests, but the waves these tempests raise affect but slightly the deeper layers of its waters. At the time of great wars and revolutions the life of the rural population, however disturbed on the whole, flows along the same lines, ruled by the same laws of climate and soil,—as it did at the time of the great intestine disturbances of the beginning of the seventeenth century. The aristocratization of life goes steadily on; the upper classes undergo a gradual process of weathering, new layers take their places, but the bulk of the agricultural population remains, now as before, the great reservoir of physical, moral, and intellectual forces, determined by conditions of climate, soil, and a past, lived on the boundary between Europe and Asia.

In her choice of material the editor has by no means made it her object to supply sensational reading. Were the majority of the Russian people composed of assassins, revo-

lutionists, mystics, dreamers of abstractions, Russia would not have outlived the great wars with the Turkish nomads of the ninth to twelfth centuries, the great Tartar invasion of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the great invasions from the West which have succeeded each other with mathematical regularity at the beginning of each of the four last centuries: 1612 by the Poles in Moscow, 1709, the Swedes in Little Russia; 1812, the French in Moscow; 1917, the German in Riga and possibly farther east. . . .

The last three volumes will be devoted to the short story of the latest period from the abortive revolution of 1905 to our own days,—when the short story has been forced by the demands of the daily and weekly press into the form familiar to England and the United States.

S. N. SYROMIATNIKOF.

From the Editor

IT is a trite, but everlastingly true axiom, that a people's life and spirit (and what is literature but the quintessence of both?) are fashioned chiefly by the nature of the country it inhabits. Now Russian nature is not jocose, not sensational; she is serious, severe half of the year; in places stern; and where and when she smiles, her smile is serious, gentle, winning, not conquering; pensive and a wee bit sad, but all the more penetrating and endearing—more deeply, enduringly so than the gorgeous, dazzling landscapes of East and South.

Accordingly, until quite lately—and that mostly in imitation of others—Russian literature has not been sensational or unchaste; it has been chiefly sympathetic and educational, sincere throughout and altruistic in spirit; serious always, if anything, too serious,

lacking vivacity, unbending—as is Russian life itself—meaning the life of the millions and millions, not that of a thin layer of city idlers imitating "the West," and after the manner of imitators, taking the worst of their model and leaving out the good. This, by the way, applies to much of the sensational fiction of these latter days, too often glaringly brutal and licentious.

The main difficulty to be encountered in the selection of material for the present set lies in the comparative scarcity, up to a recent date, of really short stories. Most of our best writers have shorter stories, which, on their merits, it would be desirable to include, but they are not short enough,—they would go as *novelettes*. A selection of such stories might at some future time form an interesting separate collection.

After Tchekhof, there is no lack of material. The abortive revolution of 1905, the Japanese war, the present war, and the present revolution yield an inexhaustible mine, in which,

however, comparatively few nuggets repay a long and tedious search.

Here again the recent rush of translations from the Russian make it difficult to avoid "overlapping" in the choice of stories, since it is impossible, in the number, to know exactly which have already figured in the lists of published translations.

For the present it is the editor's object and hope to present American readers with a selection which may not only prove acceptable in itself, but reveal to them some less familiar aspects of Russian thought and character and so help to complete their conception of this richly and variously gifted race.

Z. RAGOZIN.

PETROGRAD,

Contents

Alexander Sergéyevitch Pushkin

Alexander Sergéyevitch Pushkin

ON the 26th of May (o.s.) 1799, Alexander Pushkin was born in Moscow in a noble, but far from wealthy family, of old Novgorod stock. One of his father's ancestors, Jakun Radshitch, who died in 1206, was *Possadnik* (President) of the commonwealth of Novgorod, and his son Alexa, who became monk under the name of Balaam, founded in 1191 the monastery of Khutin, the greatest of the Novgorod monasteries, where he died as a saint and later was canonized.

Pushkin's mother, Nadiejda Hannibal, was the granddaughter of an Abyssinian prince, who somehow, via Constantinople, was brought to Russia, entered the service of Peter the Great, and became his favourite aide-de-camp.

Pushkin

Brought up by French tutors, Pushkin later graduated from the aristocratic Lyceum of Tsarskoye Selo, thus absorbing all that was best both in Russian and Western literature. He was not alone a great poet, but a profound thinker, friend of the people then enslaved by the gentry, and of the revolutionary conspirators of December, 1825, who wished to emancipate the serfs, sworn enemy of arbitrary power in all its forms and a great patriot, who proudly claimed to have glorified liberty "in this our cruel age, and to have called for mercy to the fallen."

In 1837, when only thirty-eight years old, he was killed in a duel by Dantes, a French adventurer, the adopted son of Baron Heckern, Minister of the Netherlands at St. Petersburg.

S. N. SYROMIATNIKOF.

Masquerading

By A. S. Pushkin

IN one of our remoter provinces lay the estate owned by Ivàn Petròvitch Bérestof. As a young man he had served in the Guards, then, retired from the army early in 1797, had gone to live on his estate, which he had never left since. He married a poor girl of noble birth, who died in childbirth while he was out hunting; but he soon found consolation in the care of his house and farm. He built himself a house after a plan of his own, started a cloth factory, arranged his affairs on a paying basis, and sat down to admire himself as the cleverest man in all that neighbourhood, an opinion which was not gainsaid by the neighbours, who used to come and be entertained by him, with their families and dogs. On week-days he went

around in a jacket of cotton and woollen drugget, on Sundays and holidays he wore a coat of home-made cloth. He kept an account of his expenditures, and read nothing except the official *Senate's Gazette*. He was generally liked, although considered proud. His nearest neighbour alone, Grigóri Ivànovitch Múromsky, did not hit it off well with him. Múromsky had squandered most of his fortune in Moscow and at about the same time had lost his wife. He had retired to the last estate that was left him, and there resumed his vagaries, only they took a different form. He laid out an English garden on which he spent most of his remaining income. He dressed his grooms as English jockeys. He engaged an English governess for his daughter and introduced English methods of cultivation—with disastrous results. So that, in spite of a considerable curtailing of expenses, his income did not increase. Indeed, even living in the country, he contrived to contract new debts. Yet he was considered rather a

clever man, for he was one of the first among the landowners of his province to think of mortgaging his estate to the Board of Guardians, an operation which, at the time, seemed exceedingly complicated and risky. Among the critics of Múromsky, Bérestof was one of the severest. Hatred of innovations was a distinctive feature of the man. He could not speak with equanimity of his neighbour's Anglomania and continually found occasion to criticize him. If he showed some guest round his domains, he would answer a compliment on his farming somewhat after this fashion: "Yes, sir," he would say with a sly smile, "this is not like what you see at my neighbour Múromsky's. He is welcome to his ruinous English fancies. Plain Russian bread will do for us, so there's enough of it." This and similar jests, thanks to neighbourly zeal, invariably reached Múromsky, amplified and with commentaries. The Anglomaniac stood criticism no better than do our journalists. He raged and fumed and called

his *soilus* names, like "bear," and "provincial."

Such was the mutual attitude of the two country squires when Bérestof's son came to visit him. He was a university graduate and intended to enter the army, but his father had refused his consent, while the young man felt himself absolutely unfit for the career of a civilian. Neither would yield to the other; so Alexis stayed on in noble idleness, and grew a mustache as preliminary measure.

Alexis was, to do him justice, a handsome fellow. Really, it would have been a pity that this well-knit figure should never be set off by a neatly fitting uniform and that, instead of picturesquely bestriding a spirited steed, he should spend his youth bending over stupid papers in a government office. When the neighbours saw him out hunting, galloping ahead of the rest, heedless of obstacles, they unanimously declared that he never in the world would make a decent head-clerk. The girls stole admiring glances at him, and

sometimes looked till they could not take their eyes off him; but Alexis paid them scant attention. They ascribed his insensibility to some love affair. And, sure enough, they somehow got hold of and passed from hand to hand a copy of the superscription of a letter of his, addressed to a certain "AKULÍNA PETRÒVNA KÚROTCHKIN, MOSCOW, *opposite the Monastery of St. Alexis, in the house of the coppersmith Savélief, with request to forward to A. N. R.*"

Those of my readers who never resided in the country have no idea how charming these provincial young ladies can be. Brought up in the pure country air, in the shade of their own apple trees, they get out of books all they know of life and the world. Solitude, freedom, and reading early develop in them feelings and passions unknown to our city belles, with the numberless things to divert them. For a country girl, the sound of a bell on the road is an event; an expedition to the nearest town marks an epoch in her existence; visit-

ors leave an enduring, sometimes a lifelong memory. Anybody, of course, is free to laugh at some of their peculiarities; but the jests of a superficial observer cannot destroy their substantial merits, chief among which are originality, and well-defined personality (*individualité*), without which, in Jean Paul's opinion, there is no real human greatness. In big cities women possibly get a finer education; but worldly convention and routine soon reduce individuality to a uniform level, and make souls as monotonous as the way of doing the hair. Let not this be said in a spirit of fault-finding or blame; still, *nota nostra manent*—what is written stays written——as says an ancient commentator.

It will be easily imagined what an impression Alexis must have produced among our young ladies. He was the first specimen of gloomy, disillusioned young manhood that ever had been revealed to them, the first who spoke to them of buried joys, of a blasted youth; in addition to which he sported a

black ring with a skull and crossbones on it. All these were great novelties in those parts. The young ladies became crazy about him.

But it was my Anglomaniac's daughter Liza (or Betsy, as he insisted on calling her), who busied her head most about him. The fathers did not visit each other, so she had as yet no opportunity of seeing Alexis, while all her young neighbours talked of no one else. She was seventeen. A pair of black eyes enlivened her dark and very agreeable face. She was her father's only child and, consequently, spoiled. Her high spirits and love of fun and mischief were his delight and the despair of her governess, Miss Jackson, an old maid of forty, very decorous and full of affectations, who painted, blackened her eyebrows, read *Pamela* through twice a year and, in consideration of all these accomplishments, drew an annual salary of two thousand roubles and was bored to death in "that barbarous Russia."

Liza's own maid, Nastia, was slightly older

than herself, but quite as much of a scatter-brain as her young mistress. Liza was very fond of her, told her all her secrets, discussed all her pranks with her; in a word, Nastia, in their small world, was a person of far greater importance than any *confidante* in a French tragedy.

"Please give me leave to go out this afternoon," begged Nastia one morning, while dressing her young lady.

"Very well; where do you want to go?"

"To Tutílovo, the Bérestof place. It is the cook's wife's name-day and a messenger came over yesterday to ask us to dinner."

"I like that!" laughed Liza. "The masters are not on speaking terms, and the servants entertain each other."

"Much we care for the masters!" pertly retorted Nastia. "Besides, I am yours, not your papa's. *You* never quarrelled with young Bérestof: let the old ones fight if it amuses them."

"Look here, Nastia, try, won't you, to get

a glimpse of Alexis Bérestof, and then tell me all about him,—what he looks like, what kind of a man he is."

Nastia promised, and Liza waited all day impatiently for her return. The girl made her appearance towards night.

"Well, Lizavéta Grigórievna," she began the moment she entered the room, "I did see young Bérestof, with a vengeance: we've been together all day, pretty near."

"Whatever do you mean? Do tell. Take things in their order."

"All right, I will. We set out,—myself, Aníssia, Neníla, Dúnia . . ."

"Never mind them. I know. Go ahead!"

"Well, I was to take things in their order, wasn't I? So then, we arrived just in time for dinner. The room was chock-full of people. There were some from Kolbin, from Zakhárief, the shopkeeper's wife with her daughters . . ."

"Well, well, what of Bérestof?"

"Have a little patience. So then, we sat

down to dinner. The shopkeeper's wife took the head of the table; I sat next to her . . . the daughters frowned and pouted at that, but much I cared. . . ."

"Oh, Nastia, how tiresome you are with your everlasting details!"

"Why, how impatient you are! Well then, we left the table . . . we had been sitting at it some three hours, and the dinner was fine: for dessert we had almond blanc-mange with jelly,—striped, you know, red and white. Then, straight from the table we made for the garden, and there we played blind-man's-buff; and who should come out but the young master . . ."

"Well, and what then? Is he as handsome as they say he is?"

"Wonderfully handsome; a perfect beauty, as one might say. Tall, slender, his cheeks a lovely colour."

"You don't say! Why, I thought he was pale. And how did he look to you? Melancholy? Pensive?"

"Nothing of the kind. Why, never in my life have I seen such a jolly romp of a fellow. Nothing would do him but he must play blind-man's-buff with us."

"Blind-man's-buff? With *you?* Not possible!"

"Quite possible. And what do you think? If he did not kiss everyone he could catch, right heartily too!"

"Say what you will, Nastia, but you're fibbing."

"Say what you will, but I'm not. It was all I could do to get away from him. He romped with us like that the livelong day."

"How is it then, they say he is in love and will not so much as look at a girl?"

"I don't know about that. All I can say is, he did look at *me*,—indeed, rather too much, —at me and at Tania, the shopkeeper's daughter, and at Masha, the girl from Kolbin; in fact, come to think of it, we couldn't complain of neglect, any of us. Such a boy for mischief!"

"Astonishing! And what is said of him about the house?"

"They think he's just splendid! So kind, and always so merry. There's only one thing against him,—he's too much after the girls. Though, to my mind, that isn't so great a fault either: he'll sober down in time."

"How I should like to see him!" said Liza with a sigh.

"Why, that is not difficult to manage. It is not far to Tutílovo, barely three versts. All you have to do is, take a walk that way, or else a ride; you're sure to meet him. He goes out with his gun early every morning."

"Oh no, that would never do. He might think I was running after him. Besides, you know, our fathers being at odds together . . . I could not make his acquaintance. . . . Oh, Nastia, I have it. Why couldn't I dress up as a peasant girl?"

"The very thing! Put on a coarse smock, a *sarafàn*, and walk boldly towards Tutílovo: I warrant you young Bérestof won't miss you."

"And I have the way they talk here to perfection. Oh, Nastia, my dear, what a splendid idea!"

Liza went to bed fully determined to carry out the merry masquerade. On the very next day the girls went to work on their plan. Nastia was marched off to the bazaar to buy some coarse linen, some dark blue nankeen, and some brass buttons. With Nastia's help Liza cut out the garments and set all the maids to sewing, so that everything was ready that same evening. Liza tried on her new costume before her mirror and had to confess that she never yet had looked so attractive in her own eyes. She rehearsed her rôle; walked up and down, bowing low at intervals, nodding at times after the manner of a Chinese mandarin, practising the peasant's way of speaking; she laughed and giggled, hiding her face with her sleeve, and all to Nastia's unqualified satisfaction. Only one thing bothered her: she tried walking about the yard barefoot, but the short sward

pricked her delicate flesh and the sand and gravel bruised her feet insufferably. Here too Nastia was ready with help: she took the measure of Liza's foot, then ran over to the pasture, where she found Trofim the herdsman, and ordered from him a pair of plaited bast shoes—*lapti*, such as peasants wear. The next morning Liza was awake before daybreak. The whole house was still fast asleep. Nastia watched for the herdsman outside the gate; at last she heard his horn, and while the herd of village kine was passing along, Trofim, without stopping, handed her the dainty shoes in exchange for the half rouble coin she had in readiness for him. Liza quietly dressed, gave Nastia some whispered instructions concerning Miss Jackson, crept out by the back porch, and ran across the vegetable patch, out into the open field.

The eastern sky was blushing with the roses of the dawn and golden clouds were lined up, as though waiting for the coming of the sun, as courtiers wait for the sovereign.

The cloudless sky above, the morning coolness, the dew, the breeze, and the song of birds filled Liza's heart with a child's innocent gaiety. Fearing to meet anybody she knew, she flew rather than walked. As she drew near the grove which marked the boundary of the two domains, she slackened her pace. Here she was to wait for Alexis. Her heart throbbed violently, she hardly knew why; but the dread which is inseparable from all our youthful frolics, is part, indeed the main part, of their charm. She entered the gloom of the grove. A dull, rumbling sound greeted her. Her gaiety gradually gave way to a sweet dreaminess. She thought . . . But who can tell, with any degree of precision, what a girl of seventeen, alone in a grove, at five o'clock of a spring morning, thinks of? So she walked, pensively, along a road bordered on both sides by tall trees, when suddenly a handsome setter dog barked close by her. At the same instant she heard a voice calling: "*Tout beau, Sbogar, ici!*" and a

young hunter showed up from behind some bushes.

"Don't be frightened, my girl," he said, "my dog doesn't bite."

Liza had already recovered from her momentary alarm, and at once took advantage of the occurrence.

"But I *am* frightened, *bárin*,"[1] she said with a pretty pretence of being half-scared, half-bashful; "your dog is wicked, he might go for me any time."

Alexis (the reader, surely, has guessed who the hunter was),—Alexis, meanwhile, was gazing fixedly at the village girl.

"I'll see you home, if you are afraid," he offered; "you will let me walk with you, won't you?"

"And who's to hinder ye?" replied Liza. "A man's will is his own, and the road is free to all."

[1] *Bárin*—"master, sir"— peasants and persons of the lower classes formerly always thus addressed a gentleman or nobleman and frequently do so still.

"Where are you from?"

"From the village of Prilútchén. I am the daughter of Vassíli, the blacksmith. I was going for mushrooms." (She was swinging a small basket on a string.) "And who might *you* be? Ain't you from Tutílovo?"

"You've hit it. I'm the young master's valet," answered Alexis, wishing to place himself on a level with her.

"Now that's a big story!" she retorted. "What d'ye take me for? Ye can't come it over me like that. Can't I see ye're the young master himself?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, everything."

"But still?"

"Who would not know a master from a servant? You dress differently, you talk differently, you don't even call to your dog the way we do."

Alexis liked the girl better with every minute. Not being accustomed to stand on much ceremony with pretty village maidens,

he was going to put an arm around her, but she sprang away from him and suddenly assumed an expression so frigid and severe, that, even while he laughed, he abstained from further familiarities.

"If we are to be friends," she gravely reproved him, "you will please not forget yourself."

"Who in the world taught you such grand ways?" asked Alexis laughing heartily. "Was it perchance my little friend Nástinka, your young lady's maid? Just think by what devious ways civilization spreads."

Liza, feeling that she had dropped out of her rôle, caught herself up at once.

"Don't you worry," she said pertly. "Haven't I ever visited at the mansion, do you think? I've seen and heard enough to know what's what. But, my!" she seemed suddenly to remember, "chattering here with you won't fill my basket. Better go your ways, and I'll go mine. Your pardon, and good-bye."

Liza was walking away, but Alexis caught her hand.

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Akulína," she answered, trying to free her hand. "Why? Let go, will you? It's time I was home."

"Well, Akulína, my girl, I shall certainly pay your father, the blacksmith, a visit."

"No, no, no," cried Liza, genuinely alarmed. "For God's sake, don't! Should they hear at home that I have been palavering in this grove with a gentleman, my father, Vassíli, the blacksmith, would thrash me half to death."

"But I *must* see you again."

"Well, I may come here again some time, after mushrooms."

"But when?"

"Maybe tomorrow."

"Dearest Akulína, I'd like so much to kiss you, but I don't dare. Tomorrow, then, at the same time. Sure?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you won't deceive me?"

"I won't."

"Swear you will not."

"Oh shucks! Cross my heart, I'll be here. There!"

The young people separated. Liza came out of the grove, crossed the field, crept into the garden, and flew to the dairy where Nastia awaited her. There she changed her dress, absent-mindedly answered the maid's impatient queries, and entered the drawing-room. The table was set and luncheon served. Miss Jackson, painted and tightly laced, her waist the shape of a wineglass, was cutting the thinnest slices of bread and butter. Liza's father complimented her on her early walk. "Nothing like rising with the sun," he remarked, and quoted some instances of human longevity taken from English magazines, observing that all persons who had lived a hundred years or more, had never touched alcohol and had risen with the sun, winter and summer. Liza was not listening. She

was mentally rehearsing every detail of the morning's adventure, of Akulína's conversation with the young hunter, and conscience was beginning to upbraid her. Vainly she objected to herself that their talk had never crossed the boundary of the strictest decorum, that this frolic could have no sequel: her conscience spoke louder than her reason. What most disturbed her was the promise she had given for the next day: at one time she even determined not to keep her solemn word. But then Alexis, after waiting for her in vain, might go off in search of Vassíli the blacksmith's daughter, and come across the real Akulína, a short, fat, pock-marked wench, and thus find out how she had tricked him. This possibility frightened her, and she determined to visit the grove again next morning as Akulína.

Alexis, on the other hand, was delighted. All day long he kept thinking of his new acquaintance; the image of the dark beauty haunted his sleep at night. Day had scarcely

dawned when he was up and dressed. Not even taking the time to load his gun, he betook himself afield with his faithful Sbogar, and hastened to the trysting-place. About half an hour went by in frantic expectation. At length he glimpsed the blue *sarafàn* among the bushes, and rushed forward to meet the fair Akulína. She smiled at his rapturous thanks. But he noticed at once that her face bore traces of anxiety and despondency. He insisted on knowing the cause. Liza confessed that her action seemed to her imprudent, that she repented it, that she had been loath to break her promise for this once, but that this meeting should be the last and that she besought him to end an acquaintance which boded no good to either of them. All this was spoken, of course, with strict adherence to the peasants' mode of speech; but Alexis was struck with the thoughts and feelings to which she gave utterance, so unusual were they in a plain village girl. He exerted all his eloquence to deter Akulína from her

announced intentions by assuring her of the harmlessness of his own, promised never to give her cause for regret or repentance,—besought her not to deprive him of his one solace, the joy of meeting her alone, if only every other day, or even twice a week. He spoke the language of genuine passion and was, at the moment, sincerely in love. Liza listened to him in silence.

"Give me your word," she said at last, "that you will never seek me in the village, nor question anybody about me; nor seek any other meetings than those which I shall myself appoint."

Alexis offered to swear any oath that would satisfy her, but she smilingly interrupted him:

"I ask for no oath; your promise is enough."

After this they wandered about the grove in friendly converse, until Liza announced: "Time is up." They separated, and Alexis, left alone, gave himself up to wonder that a simple little village maiden, in just two meetings, should have assumed absolute control

over him. His relation to Akulína had for him the charm of novelty, and, although the conditions imposed on him by the strange girl seemed to him irksome, the thought of breaking his promise never entered his head. The fact is that Alexis, in spite of that fateful ring, his mysterious correspondence, and his gloomy disillusionment, was a good, warm-hearted youth, unspoiled, and capable of feeling the charm of innocence.

Did I follow my inclination alone, I should certainly give a most detailed account of the young people's subsequent meetings, of their growing mutual attachment and confidence, their talks and occupations; but I know that the greater part of my readers would not share my pleasure in this. Such details would appear cloying to the general taste; so I would better omit them, and briefly say that before two months had elapsed my Alexis was head over heels in love, and Liza not much less so, though more reserved. Both were happy in the present, nor gave much thought to the future.

The thought of indissoluble bonds more than once occurred to them, but neither ever mentioned it to the other. The reason is easy to see. Attached as he was to his sweet Akulína, Alexis still remembered the distance between him and a poor little peasant girl; Liza, on the other hand, was aware of the animosity existing between their two fathers. Add to this the secret whisperings of her aroused vanity, which flattered her with the not impossible hope that she might yet see the son of the wealthy squire brought to the feet of the blacksmith's daughter. When suddenly an important event threatened to overturn their magic world.

On one of those bright.cold days in which Russian autumns abound, Ivàn Petròvitch Bérestof, sallied forth for a ride, taking along, in case of need, two or three braces of greyhounds and a few hardy lads with rattles. It so happened that, at the same hour, Grigóri Ivánovitch Múromsky was also tempted by the fine weather, and, having ordered his

dock-tailed mare saddled, rode at a trot all round his anglicized domain. Approaching the grove, he beheld his neighbour, proudly sitting his horse in his tight-fitting coat lined with fox fur, waiting for the hare which the lads, by shouting and plying their rattles, were to drive out of the brake. Could Múromsky have foreseen this encounter, he would certainly have turned aside; but he came against Bérestof quite unexpectedly and suddenly found himself within pistol shot of him. It could not be helped. As a well-bred European he could do no less than ride up to his rival with a courteous greeting, which the other returned with the good grace of a chained bear, ordered by his driver "to make his bow to the gentry!" Just at this moment the hare sprang out of the undergrowth and into the open field. Bérestof and his attending huntsman unleashed the dogs with a loud halloo and rushed after it at full speed. Múromsky's mare, never having hunted before, took fright and bolted.

Múromsky, who was given to boasting of his horsemanship, gave her the reins, secretly well pleased at being thus rid of a disagreeable companion. But the mare, having galloped up to the very edge of a steep bluff, suddenly swerved aside, and the rider did not succeed in keeping his seat and struck the frozen ground pretty heavily, where he lay, cursing his dock-tailed mare, while the animal, apparently sobered, stopped short the moment she felt free of her rider. Bérestof galloped up to his neighbour and inquired whether he were much hurt. The huntsman, meanwhile, was already leading up another horse. He helped Múromsky into the saddle, and Bérestof asked him to his own house, as the nearest. Múromsky could not well refuse, for he felt himself under obligation to him; so Bérestof rode home triumphant, having not only got his hare, but bringing in his antagonist wounded and more or less as a prisoner of war.

The conversation at luncheon was quite

friendly. Múromsky begged his neighbour to send him home, having to confess that he felt too sore and shaken to ride such a distance. Bérestof saw him to the carriage, and Múromsky would not depart until he had obtained his host's promise to pay him a visit the very next day with his son Alexis, and to take pot-luck with him. Thus did this enmity, old and deeply rooted as it was, seem ready to come to an end through the freakishness of a dock-tailed mare.

Liza ran out to meet her father.

"What is the matter, Papa? Whose carriage is this?" she questioned, amazed. "And why are you limping? Where is your own horse?"

"You never will guess, my dear," he replied, and told her all that had happened. Liza could not believe her ears. Her father gave her no time to collect her senses, informed her that both the Bérestofs were coming to dinner next day.

"You don't say!" she exclaimed, turning

pale. "Both? Father and son? Tomorrow? Here? To dinner? No, Papa! Say what you will, I will not show myself."

"Why, are you crazy?" cried Múromsky. "Have you suddenly grown bashful? Or do you hate them with an inherited hatred, like a novel heroine? Come, come, do not be foolish."

"No, Papa; not for the world and all its treasures will I appear before the Bérestofs."

Grigóri Ivánovitch shrugged his shoulders and did not stop to discuss the matter, well knowing that nothing could be gained with her by contradiction, and betook himself to rest after his memorable expedition.

Liza went to her own room and took counsel with Nastia anent the impending visit. What would Alexis think when, in the well-bred young lady he recognized his own Akulína? What opinion would he form of her conduct and principles, of her prudence? On the other hand she was very curious to see what impression an unexpected meeting

would make on him. . . . Suddenly, a wild idea came to her which she immediately imparted to Nastia. Both were delighted with it and at once determined to put it in practice.

At breakfast the next morning Múromsky asked his daughter whether she still persisted in her intention of hiding away from the expected guests.

"Papa," replied she, "I will receive them, if such is your wish, but on one condition: that, in whatever guise I appear before them, whatever I may do, you will not chide me or give any sign of astonishment or displeasure."

"Another of your wild pranks, I suppose," laughed her father. "But all right; have your way, my dark-eyed madcap."

Saying which, he kissed her on the brow, and she ran away to begin her preparations.

On the stroke of two that day a barouche, of local workmanship, drawn by six horses, entered the yard, drove round the circular plot of lawn in the centre of it, and drew up

before the porch. The old gentleman mounted the steps, aided by two of Múromsky's liveried footmen. He was followed by his son on horseback, and both together entered the dining-room where the table was already set. Múromsky received his neighbours most cordially, invited them to give a look before dinner to the garden, stables, and kennels, and led the way along the carefully swept and gravelled walks. Old Bérestof inwardly chafed at the waste of time and labour on such unprofitable fancies, but kept his counsel out of courtesy. The son shared neither the thrifty squire's prejudices, nor the self-satisfied Anglomaniac's enthusiasms; he was impatiently waiting for the daughter of the house to appear, of whom he had heard much, and, although his heart, as we know, was already pre-empted, a young and beautiful girl still possessed claims on his imagination.

On their return to the drawing-room, the three of them sat down; the old gentlemen tried to recollect stories from their days in

the army, while Alexis was considering how to comport himself in Liza's presence. He made up his mind that a cool absent-mindedness would, at all events, be the most proper part to play and prepared accordingly. The door opened; he turned towards it with an air of such consummate indifference, such haughty carelessness, as should make the heart of the most inveterate coquette to feel a thrill. Unfortunately it was not Liza who entered, but the more than middle-aged Miss Jackson, her face painted, tightly laced, with downcast eyes, and a prim little curtsey, so that Alexis' beautifully executed military salute was lost. He scarcely had time to recover himself when the door opened again, and this time it was Liza. All rose from their seats. Her father was just about to proceed with the formal introduction, when he suddenly stopped and bit his lip. Liza, his dark-complexioned Liza, was painted to the ears, worse than Miss Jackson herself; false locks, far lighter in colour than her own

hair, were puffed up after the manner of Louis XIV wigs; her waist was laced into a semblance of the letter X; she wore sleeves *á la Madame de Pompadour*, and all her mother's diamonds that were not pawned in the bank sparkled on her fingers, on her neck, and in her ears. It was impossible for Alexis to recognize his Akulína in this overdressed, ridiculous figure. His father respectfully saluted her hand, and he most unwillingly followed suit; the instant he touched those delicate fingers, he thought he felt them tremble. At the same time he caught sight of a small foot, not unintentionally slightly advanced and most coquettishly shod. This partly reconciled him to the rest of her make-up. As to the face paint, the simple-hearted boy never noticed it at first sight, and, sooth to say, neither did he suspect it later. Múromsky remembered his promise just in time and endeavoured not to show surprise, although he thought his daughter's frolic so amusing that only with difficulty could he keep

a straight face. The strait-laced Englishwoman, however, felt anything but amused. She guessed that the materials for the make-up had been purloined from her own bureau, and she coloured with vexation through the artificial whiteness of her complexion; she kept casting fiery glances at the young sinner, who paid no attention to them, leaving explanations to some future occasion.

They sat down to dinner. Alexis continued to play his part, seemingly absorbed in thought, to the exclusion of present surroundings. Liza, with the most affected little airs, minced, and lisped, and spoke nothing but French. Her father kept looking at her, utterly unable to guess what might be her object, but highly amused all the same. The Englishwoman fumed and raged in silence. Bérestof felt perfectly at home, ate enough for two, drank moderately, laughed at his own jokes, felt more and more friendly, grew talkative and rather hilarious.

They rose from the table at last, and the

guests departed. Then Grigóri Ivánovitch gave free course to his pent-up laughter and questions.

"Whatever possessed you to fool them like this?" he asked Liza. "But the paint, do you know, is rather becoming to you, and I should keep it up if I were you,—only not so outrageously,—just a little."

Liza was enchanted with the success of her invention. She embraced her father, promised to think over his suggestion, and ran off, to pacify the enraged Miss Jackson, who could hardly be prevailed upon to open her door and listen to explanations. Liza protested that she was ashamed to appear such a blackamoor before strangers, but did not venture to ask her . . . . She was sure her dear, kind Miss Jackson would forgive her . . . and so forth, and so forth. Miss Jackson, being assured that Liza had had no intention of ridiculing her, quieted down at once, kissed the girl, and, in token of reconciliation, presented her with a small jar of

the finest Spanish white, received from England, which she took with warmest thanks.

My reader will guess that the first thing Liza did the next morning was to hasten to the trysting place in the grove.

"You were at the mansion yesterday, *bárin*, weren't you?" she at once accosted Alexis. "What did you think of our young lady?"

Alexis replied that he had not noticed her.

"That's a pity," said Liza.

"Why?" he inquired.

"Because I wanted to ask you, is it true, what people are saying?"

"And what do they say?"

"Is it true that I look somewhat like her?"

"What nonsense! Compared to you she is nothing but a homely . . ."

"Oh, come now, *bárin*," she interrupted him, "you should not say such things; our young lady is so white and dainty, and dresses so beautifully! I'm not to be named in the same day with her."

Alexis swore she was nicer than all the white and pink young ladies in the world, and, to allay her uneasiness, began to describe this particular young lady and made her out so ridiculous that Liza had to laugh out loud.

"All the same," she said with a sigh, "even if she is ridiculous, I am nothing but an illiterate simpleton compared to her."

"Is that all?" cried Alexis. "Much there is to worry about. Why, just say the word, and I'll teach you in a twinkling."

"You mean it?" she exclaimed eagerly. "I think I'll try. Why not?"

"All right, dear. Shall we begin at once?"

They sat down. Alexis took from his pocket a pencil and a memorandum book, and Akulína learned the alphabet with astonishing ease. Alexis was astounded at her quickness of comprehension. The next morning she insisted on trying her hand at writing. The pencil at first was rebellious, but after a few minutes she produced quite respectable semblances of letters.

"You're a wonder," Alexis repeatedly remarked. "We go faster than by the Lancaster system!"

And indeed, on the third morning already she could spell out words and they began to read a story, when she would now and then stop to put in some remarks, at which Alexis wondered more and more. She filled a whole sheet with aphorisms taken from the same story.

A week went by. Then they started a regular correspondence. The hollow of an old oak-tree served as post office, and Nastia did duty as postman. There Alexis deposited his epistles, carefully written out in large, legible script, and there he found his lady love's missives scrawled on coarse blue wrapping paper. She visibly improved in her choice of words, and her mind showed a wider range and growing cultivation.

Meantime the recently arisen neighbourly relations between the two fathers took firmer roots and quickly ripened into friendship,

under the following circumstances. Múromsky frequently reflected that at Bérestof's death, his entire estate must pass into the hands of his son, who, in that case, would find himself one of the wealthiest landowners of the province, and there was no reason why he should not marry Liza. Bérestof, on his side, while not approving of what he called his neighbour's "English hobbies," did not deny his possessing some sterling qualities, such as, for instance, great practical ability, besides which he was highly connected and could command influences which might advance Alexis' career, and Bérestof assumed with some confidence that his neighbour would be glad of so advantageous a match for his daughter. The old gentlemen thought the matter over for some time each for himself, until at length they talked it over together, after which they embraced and promised to work each on his side for the success of their plan. Múromsky had the difficult task of persuading his Betsy to become better

acquainted with Alexis, whom she had not seen since that memorable dinner, when they had not appeared to like each other much. Alexis, at least, had never shown up since, and Liza retired to her room whenever Iván Petróvitch honoured them with a visit. "But," reflected Múromsky, "if Alexis comes here every day, Betsy will have to fall in love with him. It is in the natural order of things. Time will do the rest."

Bérestof was less uneasy concerning the success of his project. That same evening he called his son into his study, lit his pipe, and, after a brief silence, began:

"You have not mentioned the army for some time; how is that? Has the hussar uniform lost its charm in your eyes?"

"Not so, Father," respectfully replied Alexis; "but I see you do not wish me to don it. It is my duty to obey you."

"That's good," approved his father. "I see you are a dutiful son. This is a great comfort to me. But I would not force your

inclination. I do not insist on your entering the civilian service . . . at once. For the present I intend you to marry."

"To marry . . . whom, Father?" inquired Alexis, much astonished.

"Elizabeth Múromsky," answered Iván Petróvitch. "You could wish for no finer bride,—do you not think so?"

"Father, I am not thinking of marrying as yet."

"If you are not, I am thinking of it for you,—indeed have thought the matter over thoroughly."

"Say what you will, I don't in the least like Liza Múromsky."

"You will like her by and by. Habit brings liking."

"I do not feel capable of making her happy."

"Don't worry about that. Is this your respect for parental authority? A nice kind of a son, I must say!"

"Pardon me, but I do not wish to marry and I will not marry."

"You shall marry, or you shall take my curse. As to the estate, I will sell it and squander the money, so help me, God! and will not leave you one copeck. I give you three days to think it over, and in the meanwhile don't dare to show your face before me."

Alexis knew that, once his father had got anything into his hand, no kind of a wedge could knock it out again; but then he was his father's son and just as hard to be overborne. He retired into his room and gave himself up to meditations on the limits of parental authority, on Elizabeth, on his father's solemn vow to beggar him, and lastly on the fair Akulína. For the first time he was clearly conscious of being passionately in love. The romantic idea occurred to him of marrying the peasant girl and earning his own living; and the longer he dwelt on this decisive step, the more it appealed to his reason. There had been a break in the meetings in the grove, on account of rainy weather. He now wrote

Akulína a letter in his most legible hand but in the craziest style, telling her of the threatening catastrophe, and then and there offering her his hand in marriage. He took the letter at once to their sylvan post office, and lay down to sleep very much pleased with himself.

Early the next morning, firmly determined on the course he had planned out for himself, he rode off meaning to have a heart to heart talk with Múromsky and appeal to his generosity; he even hoped to win him over to his side.

"Is Grigóri Ivánovitch in?" he inquired as he drew rein before his neighbour's mansion.

"No, sir," answered the servant. "The master went out early this morning."

"How vexatious!" cried Alexis. "Maybe the young lady is in?"

"Yes, sir."

Alexis sprang from his horse, threw the reins to the man, and walked in unannounced.

"Everything shall be settled right now," he thought. "I'll have it out with herself."

He entered . . . and stopped short, stupefied. Liza. . . . No! Akulína, his lovely, dark-complexioned Akulína, not in peasant garb, but in a white morning gown, sat by the window, reading—reading his letter, and so absorbed in her occupation, that she did not hear him enter! Alexis could not refrain from a joyous exclamation. Liza started, raised her head, and, uttering a cry, sprang up to run away; but he was quicker than she and held her fast. "Akulína! Akulína!" She struggled to free herself. . . .

"*Mais laissez-moi donc, Monsieur! Mais vous êtes fou!* . . . Let me go, you are crazy!" she kept repeating, turning away.

"Akulína! my darling Akulína!" he cried over and over again kissing her hands. Miss Jackson, as witness to this scene, did not know what to think of it. At that moment the door opened, and Múromsky entered the room.

"A-ah!" he said, "you have already settled it between you, I see."

My readers will surely spare me the superfluous task of telling the end of the story.

4

A Good Shot

By A. S. Pushkin

I

WE were stationed at the small town of ——. The routine of an army officer's life is well known: in the morning—drill and riding school; dinner at the colonel's or in some Jewish eating house; in the evening—punch and cards. In —— there was not one single hospitable house, not one marriageable girl; we gathered at each other's rooms, with nothing to look at but our own uniforms.

Only one civilian belonged to our circle. He was about thirty-five, and we looked on him as on an old man. Experience of life gave him many an advantage over us; besides which an air of gloom habitual to him, his harsh temper, and ill-natured tongue exerted much influence over our youthful

minds. There was something mysterious about the man; apparently a Russian, he bore a foreign name. At one time he had served in a hussar regiment, successfully too. No one knew what had induced him to retire and to settle in this hole of a place, where he led a life at once penurious and lavish; he always walked, and wore a shabby coat, yet kept open table for all the officers of our regiment. True, his dinners consisted of only two or three dishes, prepared by a retired soldier, but champagne flowed freely. No one knew anything about his fortune or income, and no one ventured to question him on the subject. He had books, mostly on military topics, and novels. He willingly lent them, never asking for them to be returned; on the other hand he never returned a book he had borrowed. His principal exercise consisted in pistol practice. The walls of his room were honeycombed with bullet marks. His splendid collection of pistols was the only luxury of the wretched

mud hut in which he lived. He had attained an incredible skill at it, and, had he offered to shoot a pear off anybody's foraging cap, no one would have refused his head. Our talks frequently touched on duelling. Silvio (we will call him that) never took part in them. If asked whether he had ever happened to fight one, he answered curtly that he had, but entered into no details, and it was evident that such questions were displeasing to him. We concluded that he had on his conscience some luckless victim of his terrible skill. But it never entered our heads to suspect him of anything like lack of courage. There are men whose appearance is sufficient to forestall any such suspicion. An unexpected incident, however, greatly astonished us all.

One day some ten of us had dined with Silvio. There had been the usual amount of drinking, which means a good deal of it, and after dinner we began begging for cards and asking our host to keep the bank. He refused

again and again for he hardly ever played; but at last he called for cards, poured out some fifty gold pieces on the table, and began. We surrounded him, and the play began in earnest. Silvio always kept absolutely silent at cards, never disputed or explained. If a punter happened to make a mistake in making up the accounts, he would pay the difference or make a note of it. We knew this peculiarity of his, and never interfered with him, but we had among us an officer who had but recently joined. In the course of the game he absent-mindedly turned down a corner, thereby doubling the stake, although not meaning to do so. Silvio took the chalk and evened out the account as was his wont. The officer, thinking Silvio had made a mistake began to explain. Silvio silently went on throwing the cards. The officer, losing patience, took the brush and rubbed out what he considered had been wrongly added. Silvio then took the chalk and again wrote down the correct figure. The officer, heated

with wine, the excitement of the game, and his comrades' laughter, and fancying himself cruelly ill-used, seized a brass candlestick from the table and hurled it at Silvio, who only just dodged it. We sat transfixed. Silvio rose to his feet, pale with rage, his eyes on fire, and said:

"Sir, leave the room, and thank God that this took place in my own house."

We had no doubts as to what must follow, and looked on our new comrade as already dead. The officer left the house, declaring himself ready to answer for the insult in whatever way the banker should desire. The game continued some minutes longer, but, feeling that out host's thoughts were not on it, we left off one after another and sought our various quarters, discussing the vacancy which was sure to open soon.

The next morning at riding school we already inquired whether the poor lieutenant were still among the living, and when he appeared among us, we put the same question

to himself. He answered that he had not yet heard from Silvio. This astonished us greatly. We went to Silvio's and found him in his yard, planting ball after ball in the ace of a card he had glued to the gate. He received us as usual, nor alluded with a word to last night's incident. Three days, and the lieutenant not yet dead! We wonderingly asked each other: Would Silvio really not fight? He did not. He accepted the flimsiest apology and there the matter ended.

This injured him exceedingly in the minds of the youngsters. A lack of daring is what the young find it hardest to excuse, personal bravery, as a rule, being in their eyes the height of manly attainment and covering a multitude of sins. Still, the thing was forgotten after a while, and Silvio gradually regained his former influence.

I alone could not feel the same towards him. Naturally of a romantic disposition, I had grown attached to this man, whose past was an enigma, and who appeared to me as the

hero of some mysterious romance. He seemed fond of me too. At least it was only with me that he dropped his ill-natured way of talking of people, and spoke instead on various subjects most simply and pleasantly. But after that luckless evening the thought that his honour had suffered and remained unavenged by his own will—that thought rankled in my mind and would not let me treat him as formerly. I was ashamed to look him in the face. He was too clever and experienced not to be aware of this and not to guess the reason. He seemed grieved, at least I thought I noticed in him once or twice a wish to give me the explanation he refused to the others; but I eluded him, and his manner to me became remote. From that time on I met him only in the presence of others, and our former open-hearted conversations stopped entirely.

Dwellers in great cities, with their manifold interests and amusements, have no idea of a number of experiences familiar to provincials

and to the denizens of small towns, such as, for instance, waiting for the mail. On Tuesdays and Fridays our regimental office was crowded with officers, waiting, some for money, some for letters, others for newspapers. Packages were usually opened on the spot, news exchanged, and the office presented a most animated scene. Silvio had his letters addressed to our regiment and was generally present. One day a package was handed to him, from which he tore the seal with every sign of the greatest impatience. As he ran his eyes over the letter, they threw fire. The officers, busy as they were, each with his own letters, did not notice him. He addressed them:

"Gentlemen," said he, "unexpected circumstances demand my immediate departure. I leave tonight. I hope you will not refuse me the pleasure of dining with me before I go. I shall expect you too," he added, turning to me,—"I will take no denial."

With these words he hastily withdrew. We

all agreed to meet at his house and went our several ways.

Entering Silvio's house at the appointed time, I found well-nigh the entire regiment assembled there. All his belongings were already packed; nothing was left but the bare shot-ridden walls. We sat down to dinner. Our host was in the best of spirits; his gaiety proved infectious; champagne corks kept flying, foaming goblets unceasingly hissing, and we never tired of wishing our departing friend a safe journey and all good things. It was late when we rose from the table. While we were getting our caps, Silvio said good-bye to each in turn, but took my hand and detained me just as I was stepping out.

"I want to speak to you," he whispered. I stayed.

When all had gone we took seats opposite each other and lit our pipes in silence. Silvio looked preoccupied; he showed no trace of his overdone gaiety. His gloomy pallor, his glowing eyes, the smoke issuing from his

lips, made him look a perfect demon. It was several minutes before he broke the silence.

"We may never meet again," he began at last. "Before we part I should like to clear up matters between us. You may have observed that, as a rule, I care little for people's opinion of me; but I like you, and I feel that it would grieve me to leave a wrong impression on your mind."

He paused, and began to fill his pipe, which had burned down; I remained silent and waited, with downcast eyes.

"You must have thought it strange," he went on, "that I did not demand satisfaction from that drunken fool R ——. You will allow that, having the choice of weapons, I held his life in my hands, while mine was all but safe. I might claim generosity as my only motive in sparing him, but I will not tell a lie. Could I have punished R —— with no risk at all to myself, I should on no account have pardoned him."

I looked at Silvio in amazement. So strange an avowal entirely upset me. He continued:

"It's the truth. I have not the right to risk my life. Six years ago I was struck in the face, and my enemy is living still."

My curiosity was excited to the highest degree.

"You did not fight him?" I exclaimed. "Circumstances, I suppose, separated you?"

"I did fight him," replied Silvio, "and I will show you a memento of the duel."

He rose and took from a cardboard box a red cap with a large gold tassel and gold band, the sort of thing the French call *un bonnet de police*, and placed it on his head; it was shot through an inch above the brow.

"As you are aware," he went on, "I served in the —— regiment of hussars. You know my disposition. Domineering now, it was far more so, amounting to a passion, in my young days. In my time rowdyism was the fashion, and I was the greatest rowdy in the army. We used to boast of our drinking:

I outdrank the renowned B —— the hero of many a drinking song by the soldier poet D ——. Duels were of daily occurrence in our regiment, and in all of them I was either actor or witness. I was adored by my brother officers, while the commanding officers, who were continually being changed, looked on me as on a necessary nuisance.

"I was quietly (though *quiet* is not exactly the word!) enjoying my reputation, when we were joined by a young man, the scion of a wealthy and noble family (whom I will not name). Never in my life have I met so brilliant and well-endowed a creature! Imagine youth, beauty, intellect, the most entrancing gaiety, bravery the most reckless, a great name, money in quantities untold always at his command, then imagine the effect of such a paragon appearing in our midst. My supremacy was endangered. Fascinated by my renown, he at first sought my friendship, but I met his advances coldly and he withdrew without regret. I hated

him. His success in the regiment and among women made me wild. I began to seek occasions for a quarrel. My epigrams he answered in kind, but his epigrams always seemed to me more spontaneous and brilliant than mine and were undoubtedly gayer, for he was playing while I raged. At last, at a ball, given by a Polish nobleman, seeing him the object of attentions on the part of all the ladies, and especially of the hostess to whom I was making violent love at the time, I whispered in his ear some insulting triviality. He flushed and, turning, struck me in the face. We rushed for our sabres; sundry ladies fainted; we were dragged apart, and on the same night drove to a distance, to have it out.

"It was daybreak of a spring morning. I stood on the appointed spot with my three seconds, and waited for my adversary in a state of indescribable impatience. The sun rose and at once made itself felt. I saw my adversary from afar. He was walking, accompanied by only one second, and carried

his short uniform jacket hanging on his sabre by his side. We advanced to meet him. He approached, holding his cap full of cherries. The seconds measured the distance: twelve paces. I was to have fired first, but such was my agitation, caused by extreme anger, that I could not feel sure of my aim and left the first shot to him. To this he would not consent. Then it was decided to draw lots. Fortune favoured him in this as in all things. He took aim, and shot a hole in my cap. It was my turn now. His life was in my hands. I looked at him hungrily, searching his face for the least shade of uneasiness. He stood under my pointed pistol picking the ripest cherries out of the heap in his cap and spitting out the stones, some of which reached me. His indifference enraged me. 'Where is the sense,' I thought, 'of taking his life when he prizes it so cheaply?' A wicked thought flashed through my brain. I lowered my pistol.

"'I see you don't mind death just now,' I

said to him, 'you are too busy lunching; I don't care to disturb you.'

"'You do not disturb me in the least,' he replied. 'Fire away! As you please, however. The shot is yours; I shall be at your disposal any time.'

"I turned to the seconds and declared that I was not going to fire just yet. Thus the duel ended for the time.

"I retired from the army and settled here, in this out-of-the-way place. Not a day has passed since, that I have not thought of my revenge. The time has come at last."

Silvio took from his pocket the letter which he had received that morning and handed it to me to read. Somebody (it must have been some agent of his) wrote from Moscow that "*the person he knew*" was going to marry a young and beautiful girl.

"You can guess," resumed Silvio, "who is this *person I know*. I am going to Moscow. We shall see whether he will meet death with the same equanimity on the eve of his wed-

ding as when he was awaiting it munching cherries!"

With these words he rose, threw his injured cap on the floor, and began pacing the room like a caged tiger. I listened to him immovably, agitated by strange, contradictory feelings.

The servant entered and announced that the horses were waiting. Silvio pressed my hand warmly; we embraced. He got into the light carriage in which were deposited two boxes, one containing pistols, the other his personal effects. We said good-bye once more, and the horses started at a gallop.

II

Several years later family affairs compelled me to take up my abode in an obscure little village. While attending to my immediate business in house and farm, I never ceased sighing for my former noisy, careless existence. Hardest of all I found getting used to spend-

ing the spring and summer evenings in absolute solitude. Up to dinner time I somehow managed to drag through the hours, talking with the bailiff, visiting the various works or the new establishments; but at the approach of twilight I became restless and did not know what to do with myself. The few books found by me under wardrobes and in lumber-rooms I all but knew by heart. All the folk-tales old Kirilovna the housekeeper could remember I had made her tell over and over again; the women's folk-songs made me desperately sad. At one time I took to unsweetened fruit cordials, but they gave me headaches; and besides I got scared at the possibility of becoming a "silent drinker"—the worst kind of a drinker, examples of which were not wanting in our neighbourhood.

I had no near neighbours, with the exception of two or three such worthies, whose conversation consisted chiefly of hiccups and deep sighs. Solitude was more bearable. At last I made up my mind to go to bed as

early as possible and dine as late as possible, thus shortening the evenings and lengthening the days, and found that the idea worked well.

Within four versts of me was a large and wealthy estate, belonging to Countess B——, but only the manager lived there, while the Countess had visited the property but once, as a bride, and even then had not remained over a month. But in the course of the second spring of my seclusion a rumour got about that she was coming with her husband to spend the summer. They did arrive in the first days of June.

The arrival of a wealthy neighbour is an event in the life of country residents. Masters and servants talk about it two months before and three years after. For my own part I must confess I was strongly impressed with the news. I was consumed with impatience to behold my fair neighbour, said to be young and beautiful, and on the very first Sunday after her arrival I drove over after dinner to make my bow and introduce myself as their

excellencies' nearest neighbour, very much at their service.

A footman took me into the Count's study and left me there, while he went to announce me. The spacious apartment was fitted up with the utmost luxury; bookcases stood along the walls, and above each was a bronze bust; a wide mirror occupied the space above the mantelpiece; the floor was covered with green cloth with rugs dispersed over it. My poor den had got me out of the habit of anything like luxury, and it was so long since I had seen it in other people's houses that it made me feel bashful and I waited for the Count with something like the flutter with which a provincial solicitor awaits the entrance of a cabinet minister. A door opened, and a remarkably handsome man of about thirty-two entered the room. The Count approached me with open and friendly countenance. I took courage and was beginning to introduce myself, but he cut me short. We sat down. His pleasant, unconstrained

conversion dispelled my timidity and I was gradually returning to my normal condition, when the Countess unexpectedly entered, and confusion overcame me worse than before. She was indeed a beauty. The Count introduced me. I wished to appear at my ease, but the more I tried to assume an unconcerned air, the more awkward I felt. They both, in order to give me time to recover myself and to feel more at home with them, began talking between themselves, treating me as a good neighbour, with whom they need not stand on ceremony. In the meantime I began to walk up and down, examining the books and pictures. I know little of pictures, but one took my attention captive. It represented some Swiss view, but what struck me about it was not the painting, but the fact that it showed a double bullet hole, one ball having been planted on top of the other.

"What a masterly shot!" I observed, turning to the Count.

"Yes," he replied, "remarkable, isn't it? Are you a good shot?" he continued.

"Pretty fair," I answered, glad that the conversation had shifted to familiar ground. "At thirty paces I won't miss a card, provided, of course, I know the pistols."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the Countess, appearing much interested. "And you, my dear, could you hit a card at thirty paces?"

"Sometime," replied the Count, "we will put it to the test. At one time I was not a bad shot, but it is four years now since I last held a pistol."

"Oh, in that case," I remarked, "I will wager you will not hit a card even at twenty paces. The pistol requires daily practice. I know that from experience. In our regiment I was considered one of the best shots. Yet, when I happened not to touch a pistol for a month, because mine were away for repairs, what do you think? The first time I tried my hand again, I missed a bottle four times running at twenty paces! We had a

captain, the regiment wit, great at jokes; he happened to be present, and he said to me: 'Evidently, brother, your hand will not rise against a bottle.' No, no, Count; you must not neglect the work, or you will be out of practice before you know it. The best shot it ever was my good fortune to meet practised daily, at least three times before dinner. It was routine with him, just like his one glass of whiskey."

The Count and Countess exchanged glances.

"And just how well did he shoot?" inquired the Count.

"I'll tell you how well; he would see a fly on the wall. . . . You laugh, Countess? I tell you it's God's truth. . . . Well, he would see a fly and call out: 'Kuzma, my pistol.' Kuzma would bring the pistol, ready loaded. Bang! and the fly was crushed into the wall!"

"This is wonderful!" exclaimed the Count. "And what was his name?"

"Silvio."

"Silvio!" cried the Count. "Did you know Silvio?"

"How should I not? We were friends. He was received in our regiment like a brother officer. But it is some five years now since I have heard of him. So you, too, knew him?"

"Indeed, I did know him. Did he never tell you of a very curious occurrence?"

"Do you mean the story of some scapegrace striking him at a ball?"

"But did he tell you the scapegrace's name?"

"He did not. . . . Oh my . . . !" I broke off, as the truth flashed upon me. "Forgive me. . . . I did not know. . . . Can it have been you?"

"Myself," replied the Count, much disturbed, "and this picture is a memento of our last meeting."

"Oh, my dear," broke in the Countess, "for God's sake do not tell of that! Only to hear of it will drive me frantic."

"Nay, but I *will* tell," replied the Count. "He knows how I insulted his friend; let him hear how Silvio took his revenge."

He advanced an armchair towards me and I listened with the liveliest curiosity to the following narrative:

"Five years ago I married. I spent the first month, the honeymoon, here on this estate. To this house I owe the best moments of my life and one of my most painful memories.

"One evening we were out riding. My wife's horse somehow got cranky; she took fright, gave me the bridle, and started to walk home. In the yard I saw a light travelling carriage and was told there was a gentleman sitting in my study, who would tell neither his name, nor his errand. On entering the room I saw in the half light, standing by the fireplace, a man all covered with dust, with a beard of several days' growth. I went up to him, trying to make out his features. 'You do not recognize me, Count?' he said

with an unsteady voice. 'Silvio!' I cried, and felt, I confess, my hair stand up on end. 'Precisely,' he went on. 'There is a shot due me. I have come to unload my pistol. Are you ready?' The pistol was sticking out of his breast-pocket. I measured off twelve paces and stood up there in that corner, begging him to fire at once, before my wife returned. He took his time. He asked for light. Candles were brought. I closed the doors, giving order that no one should enter, and once more begged him to fire. He took out his pistol and took aim. . . . I counted the seconds. . . . A horrible minute went by. Silvio lowered his arm. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'that the pistol is not loaded with cherry stones. The ball is so heavy. I cannot get rid of the impression that we are having, not a duel, but a murder. I am not used to firing at unarmed men. Let us begin all over again: we will draw lots for the first shot.' My head was in a whirl. I believe I objected. . . . At length we loaded an-

other pistol. We rolled two tickets. He dropped them into the cap I had shot through on the former occasion. I again drew out the first number. 'You are devilishly lucky, Count,' he said with a smile I shall never forget. I cannot think what I went through, or how he ever could compel me, but I did fire . . . and hit that picture there. . . ."

The Count pointed to the picture with the bullet hole. His face was afire; the Countess was paler than her handkerchief; I could not help an exclamation.

"I fired," continued the Count, "and, thank God, missed. . . . Then Silvio (at that moment he really was frightful) slowly levelled his pistol at me, when the door suddenly flew open, Mary rushed in, and, with a shriek, threw her arms around my neck. Her presence returned me all my self-possession. 'Darling,' I said, 'do you not see that this is a game we are playing? Why, how frightened you are! Go take a drink of water and

come back to us; I will introduce you to my old friend and comrade.' Mary did not quite believe me. 'Tell me,' said she, turning to Silvio, who stood motionless and menacing, 'is it true, what my husband says,—that you are both in jest?' 'He is always in jest, Countess,' answered Silvio. 'Once he struck me in jest, then, still in jest, shot through my cap; just now he fired at me in jest; now the humour takes *me* to get off a little jest. . . .' Whereupon he actually raised his arm, meaning to take aim . . . before her eyes! She threw herself at his feet. 'Rise, Mary! for shame!' I cried in a fury. 'And you, sir, will you stop making sport of a poor woman? Will you fire, or will you not?' 'I will not,' answered Silvio; 'I am content. I have seen your agitation, your shrinking. I have forced you to fire at me. I ask no more. You will remember me. I leave you to your conscience.' With that he made for the door, but stopped at the threshold, turned round, glanced at the picture, fired almost without

taking aim, and was gone. My wife lay in a swoon; the servants did not dare to stop him, but stared at him, terrified. He stepped out on the porch, called to his driver, and was off before I came to my senses."

The Count, having ended, was silent. Thus it was I learned the end of the story which had so deeply impressed me on that evening. The hero of it I never met again. It is rumoured that Silvio, at the time of Alexander Ypsilanti's insurrection, led a detachment of Hetærists and fell under Skuliany.

The Snowstorm

By A. S. Pushkin

TOWARDS the end of the year 1811,—an epoch memorable to us Russians,—good Gavrila Gavrilovitch R—— was living on his estate of Nenaradovo. He was renowned over all the countryside for his hospitality and open-heartedness. Visitors from all the neighbourhood all but daily came to his house, some to eat and drink, and play "boston" with his wife Prascovia Petrovna, at five copecks, and some to see their daughter, Maria Gavrilovna, a slender, pale girl of seventeen. She was thought to be a good match, and many sought her, either for themselves or for their sons.

Maria Gavrilovna had been brought up on French novels; consequently, she was in love. Her choice had fallen on a poor infantry ensign, who happened to be at his

country home, on leave. No need to say that the young man was consumed with an equal passion, or that his lady-love's parents, having become aware of their mutual inclination, forbade their daughter so much as to think of him, while they treated him as if he had been a retired police assessor.

Our lovers carried on a correspondence and they met daily in the pine-grove or by the old chapel. There they swore each other eternal fidelity, lamented their fate, and made all sorts of plans for the future. What with corresponding and what with conversing, they very naturally arrived at the following reasoning: since we cannot breathe apart from each other, and our cruel parents' will stands between us and happiness, could not a way be found to dispense with their consent? It goes without saying that this happy thought first occurred to the young man and that it greatly pleased the romantic imagination of the young lady.

Winter came and put a stop to their meet-

ings; but the correspondence went on all the more briskly. Vladimir Nicolaevitch besought her in every letter to trust herself to him: they would be secretly married, lie low for a while, then throw themselves at the feet of the parents, who would surely be touched by the lovers' heroic constancy and sufferings, and would unfailingly exclaim: "Children, come to our arms."

Maria Gavrilovna hesitated long; many plans of flight were rejected by her. At last she agreed to one: on a certain night she was to refuse supper and retire to her room on pretence of a headache. Her maid shared in the plot; they were to descend into the garden from the back porch; outside of the garden they were to find a sleigh awaiting them and they would be driven five versts to the neighbouring village of Jadrino, straight to the church, where Vladimir would be expecting them.

On the eve of the fateful day Maria Gavrilovna slept but little; she did some packing,

making a bundle of her clothes, wrote a long letter to a friend, a rather sentimental young lady, and another to her parents. She took leave of them in the most moving terms, excusing her offence by the resistless force of passion and ended by vowing that the most blissful hour of her life would be that, when she should be allowed to throw herself at the feet of her dearest parents. Having sealed both missives with a seal of Tula workmanship,[1] representing two flaming hearts with an appropriate motto, she flung herself on her bed just before daybreak and fell into a slumber, but the most distressing visions kept waking her. Now it seemed to her that, at the very minute when she was taking her seat in the sleigh, her father stopped her, hauled her over the snow with a velocity that took her breath away, and cast her into a dark bottomless cellar . . . and she sank headlong

[1] The city of Tula is famed for the excellence of its metallic wares. The Tula samovars are the finest. —TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

down, with a dying flutter of the heart; now again she saw Vladimir, lying on the grass, pale, blood-stained. Dying, he besought her in heartrending tones to hasten and be wedded to him. . . . Other formless, senseless visions, one after another, passed before her. She rose at last unusually pale and with a genuine headache. Her father and mother noticed her restlessness; their tender alarm and ceaseless questions: "What is the matter, Masha? Are you not well?" cut her to the heart. She strove to quiet their fears, to appear cheerful, but could not.

The evening came. The thought that this was the last day she would spend in her home oppressed her. She felt but half alive, she was secretly taking leave of all the persons and all the objects surrounding her. Supper was served; her heart throbbed violently. In a trembling voice she declared she wanted no supper and began to say good-night to father and mother. When receiving their nightly kiss and blessing, she very nearly

broke down. Arrived in her own room, she dropped into an easy chair and burst into a flood of tears. Her maid did her best to quiet her and get her to brace up. Everything was ready. In half an hour Masha would say farewell for ever to her home, her pretty chamber, her peaceful girl's life. . . . Outdoors a snowstorm was raging; the wind howled, the window-shutters clattered; all seemed to her threat and evil omen. Soon the house was steeped in silence and slumber. Masha put on a loose, warm gown, wrapped a shawl around her head and shoulders, took up her casket, and stepped out on the back porch. The maid followed her, carrying two bundles. They descended into the garden. The storm did not abate, the wind blew in their faces, as though in an attempt to stop the young delinquent. They had difficulty in reaching the end of the garden. The sleigh was waiting for them outside, on the road. The horses, chilled through, would not stand still. Vladimir's coachman was

walking up and down across the road in front of them, keeping the fidgety animals back. He seated the young lady and her maid, stowed away the bundles and the casket, seized the reins, and the horses flew. Let us now leave the fugitive to fate and the skill of Terenti, the coachman, and turn to the young gallant.

All that day Vladimir had been racing from place to place. In the morning he had called on the priest at Jadrino and had with much difficulty persuaded him to act; then he had gone to hunt up witnesses among the neighbours. The first whom he visited, one Dravin, retired cornet, readily consented. This adventure, he assured Vladimir, reminded him of former times and the pranks he had played in his hussar days. He persuaded him to stay to dinner, assuring him that there would be no trouble finding the two other witnesses. As it happened, two visitors made their appearance immediately after dinner. They were the surveyor Schmidt,

sporting a moustache and spurs, and the son of the chief of the district police, a boy of about sixteen, who had but just entered an Uhlan regiment. They not only assented to Vladimir's request, but even swore they were ready to lay down their lives for him. Vladimir rapturously embraced them and drove home, to make his preparations.

Twilight had long set in. He dispatched his trusty Terenti to Nenaradovo with his *troika* and most particular, detailed instructions; for himself he ordered the small sleigh with one horse and started for Jadrino unaccompanied. Maria Gavrilovna was to arrive there within two hours. He knew the road well; it was a twenty minutes' drive at most.

But Vladimir no sooner had driven out of his yard into the open field than the wind rose and the whirling snow blinded him. In one minute no trace of the road was left; the country around vanished in a turbid yellowish mist, in which danced the white

snowflakes; earth and sky were as one; Vladimir had lost the road and vainly tried to find his way back to it; the horse stepped at random and every minute or so floundered into a drift, or else into a hollow; every other minute the sleigh upset; all Vladimir could do was to try not to lose the general direction. But it seemed to him that more than half an hour had elapsed, yet he had not reached the Jadrino grove. · Another ten minutes, and still no grove. He drove across a field, intersected by deep ravines. The snowstorm raged on, the sky did not clear. The horse began to show signs of exhaustion; he was himself bathed in perspiration notwithstanding that he was half the time in snow to his waist.

At length he saw that he was going the wrong way. He stopped short, he tried to think, to remember and came to the conviction that, at a certain point, he should have turned to the right. He did so now. His horse could hardly lift a foot. He had been

on his way over an hour. Jadrino could not be far now. But he drove on and on, and yet came not to the end of the field. Drifts alternated with ravines; the sleigh upset and he lifted it, over and over again. The minutes flew; Vladimir's uneasiness increased apace.

At length some dimly black object caught his sight. He turned that way. As he approached it, he saw a grove. "Thank God," he thought, "it is near now." He drove along the grove, thinking to strike the familiar road or to drive round it, as Jadrino was just beyond it. Soon he did find the road and entered the gloom spread by the trees, though denuded by winter. Here, at least, the wind could not exert its fury; the road was smooth, the horse cheered up, and Vladimir felt more at ease.

But he drove on and on, and still no Jadrino; there was no end to the wood. Vladimir saw with dismay that he had struck an unfamiliar wood. Despair seized him. He struck the horse, and the poor animal at-

tempted a brisker pace, but was unable to keep it up, and in less than a quarter of an hour, had relapsed into a slow jogtrot, in spite of the unfortunate driver's utmost efforts.

Gradually the wood began to thin, and soon Vladimir was out of it. And still no Jadrino in sight. It must have been nigh on midnight. The tears stood in Vladimir's eyes. He now drove at random. The storm had abated, the clouds were dispersing; the white plain lay before him, a vast, wavy expanse. The night was not very dark. He could discern, not far away, a small hamlet composed of three or four huts with their stables and barns; he drove thither. Stopping before the first hut, he sprang to the ground, ran up to a window and knocked. In a few minutes the window was slightly raised, and an old man's white beard was stuck out.

"What dost want?"

"How far is it to Jadrino?"

"Jadrino is it? How far?"

"Yes, yes. How far?"

"Not far; ten versts or so."

On hearing which Vladimir clutched at his hair and remained motionless, like a man who has just received his death sentence.

"And where might ye be from?" inquired the old man. Vladimir had not the heart to answer the question.

"Could you get me horses to Jadrino, old man?" he asked.

"Horses? As if we had them," retorted the old peasant.

"Could not I have, at least, a guide? I'll pay whatever he asks."

"Wait a bit," said the peasant, closing the window. "I'll send thee my son."

Vladimir waited. But a minute had not passed when he was knocking again.

The window was raised; the beard reappeared.

"What dost want?"

"What about your son?"

"Presently. He's putting on his boots.

May be thou'rt cold? Come in and warm thyself."

"Thanks. Send the boy quickly."

The gate creaked; a lad with a stout stick came out and walked ahead, now showing the way, now looking for it among the drifts.

"What time is it?" asked Vladimir.

"Day will break pretty soon," answered the young fellow.

After this Vladimir said not a word more.

When they reached Jadrino the roosters were crowing and it was daylight. The church was closed. Vladimir paid his guide and drove to the priest's house. His *troika* was not in the yard. What news awaited him? . . .

But let us return to the good people at Nenaradovo and see what is happening there.

The old people awoke and adjourned to the drawing-room. Gavrila Gavrilovitch in his nightcap and frieze jacket, Prascovia Petrovna in a quilted wrapper. The samovar was

brought in, and Gavrila Gavrilovitch sent a small maid to inquire of Maria Gavrilovna, how she felt and how she had rested. The small maid returned with the answer that *baryshnia*[1] had had a bad night, but felt better and would soon appear. Sure enough, the door opened and, the next minute, Maria Gavrilovna was saying good morning to papa and mamma.

"How is your head, Masha?" asked her father.

"Better, Papa," she answered.

"You surely got a touch of charcoal fumes," suggested her mother.

"Possibly, Mamma," she assented.

The day passed as usual, but in the night Masha was taken ill. A man was sent to town for the doctor. He came towards evening and found the patient delirious. A violent brain fever declared itself and for

[1] *Barin* the master; *barynia*, the mistress; *baryshnia*, the young lady. An unmarried lady, however advanced in years, is also *baryshnia*.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

two weeks the poor girl lay at death's door.

No one in the house knew of the attempted elopement. The letters she had left had been burned; the maid did not speak of it to a single soul, from fear of her master's anger. The priest, the retired ensign, and the nice young Uhlan were mum, and Terenti the coachman, had his own good reasons for never letting a word escape him, even in his cups. Thus the secret was kept by more than half a dozen conspirators. But Masha herself betrayed it in her ceaseless ravings. However, her words were so utterly incongruous that her mother, who never left her bedside, could only gather from them, that her daughter was mortally in love with Vladimir, and came to the conclusion, that this love was the cause of her illness. She conferred with her husband and with a few friends, and it was unanimously decided that such, evidently, was the decree of fate, from which there is no escape not on the fleetest horse; that poverty

is not a crime,—that it is not money you are to live with, but the man, and that old saws are wonderfully convenient in all such cases when we cannot ourselves think of anything to justify this or that course we intend to take.

The patient, meanwhile, was convalescing. Vladimir had not been seen in the house for quite a length of time; he had been frightened away by the reception he habitually met with. It was agreed to send for him and to announce to him the happy news; the parents' consent to his suit. But what was not their astonishment when, in reply to their invitation, they received from him a half-demented missive, in which he declared his intention never more to darken their doors and begged them to forget an unfortunate wretch, whose only hope lay in death. A few days later they heard that Vladimir had gone to join his regiment. This happened in the year 1812.

It was long before it was thought possible to

tell the convalescent of this. She never mentioned Vladimir. But several months later, on reading his name in a list of officers who had distinguished themselves and been severely wounded under Borodino, she fell in a swoon, and a return of the brain fever was feared. Thank God, however, the swoon was followed by no evil consequences.

But another sorrow visited her soon after; her father died, leaving her sole heiress of his entire fortune. In this, however, she found no comfort, and she sincerely shared poor Prascovia Petrovna's grief, and swore never to be separated from her. They both left Nenaradovo with its sad associations, and went to live on another estate belonging to them.

Here also suitors flocked around the charming and wealthy heiress, but she never gave any one of them the least encouragement. Her mother sometimes urged her to choose a mate; she shook her head and fell into doleful musing. Vladimir was no more; he had died

in Moscow, the day before the French entered the city. Masha seemed to hold his memory sacred; at least she treasured every object which could recall him to her; books he had read, his drawings, the music and verses he had copied for her. The neighbours, when they heard her story, wondered at her constancy and impatiently waited for the hero who should at last triumph over this modern Artimisia's mournful faithfulness.

The war, meanwhile, came to its glorious end. Our regiments returned from abroad. People ran to meet them. The bands played conquered music: *Vive Henri Quatre*, Tyrolian waltzes, and arias from *Gioconda*. Officers who had gone forth into the field almost boys, now returned as men, ripened in the atmosphere of battles, their breasts hung with decorations. The soldiers merely chattered among themselves, interspersing their speech with French and German words. Time never to be forgotten! Time of glory and exultation! How did each Russian heart beat high

at the word "Fatherland?" How sweet the tears of reunion! How unanimous the nation's feelings of pride and love for the sovereign! And for him—what a moment!

The women—our Russian women—were wonderful. There was no trace of their habitual coldness. Their enthusiasm was truly ravishing; when going forth to meet the victors, they shouted "Hurrah!"

"And flung their caps into the air."

Who of the surviving officers but will confess that to the Russian women of that time he owed his best, most precious reward!

All through those brilliant days Maria Gavrilovna lived with her mother in a distant province and saw nothing of how the two capitals celebrated the return of the armies. But the general enthusiasm was, if anything, still more vehement there. An officer's appearance in those parts was to him a veritable triumph, and a lover in a dress-coat felt anything but comfortable in his neighbourhood.

We mentioned before that Maria Gavrilovna, in spite of her coldness, was surrounded by admirers as numerous as ever. But all had to retreat when the wounded Hussar Colonel Burmin made his appearance at her manor, with the Cross of St. George on his lapel and, on his cheek, "an interesting pallor," as the young ladies used to say. He was about twenty-six years of age, and came to spend his sick leave on his estates, which adjoined Maria Gavrilovna's. She received him with much distinction. In his presence her habitual pensiveness gave place to animation. She could not be said to flirt with him, but a poet, noting her behaviour, might have exclaimed:

"Se amor non è, che dunque?"
("If this be not love, what is it?")

Burmin, indeed, was a very nice young man. He had just the kind of mind which pleases women: observant, free from pretension, given to careless raillery, within the

bounds of propriety. His manner with his hostess was free and simple, but, no matter what she said or did, he watched her with all his soul in his eyes. He appeared to be of a quiet and modest disposition; yet fame would have it that he had been at one time a terrible scapegrace, which reputation did him no harm in Maria Gavrilovna's opinion, any more than in that of young women generally; she readily excused youthful pranks which showed high spirits and daring.

But most of all . . . (more than his tenderness, his "interesting pallor," and his bandaged arm), the young Hussar's silence aroused her curiosity and stimulated her imagination. She could not but be conscious that she pleased him; he, on his side, clever and experienced as he was, must have observed that she treated him differently from others. How was it then that she did not yet see him at her feet, had not yet heard his avowal? What restrained him? The timidity inseparable from a genuine passion, pride,

or the craftiness of a wily Lovelace? She was sorely puzzled. After much thought, she made up her mind that timidity was the only cause, and determined to encourage him by greater attentions, and, according to circumstances, even tenderness. She planned the most unexpected *dénouement* and impatiently awaited the moment of the desired romantic declaration. Mystery of whatever kind, is always irksome to the female heart. Her strategy had the desired effect. Burmin fell into such deep melancholy, his black eyes burned with so ardent a fire as they followed Maria Gavrilovna's every movement, that the decisive moment seemed to be at hand. Already the neighbours were talking of the wedding as of a settled thing and kind Prascovia Petrovna was rejoicing that her daughter had at last found a worthy mate.

One day the old lady was sitting alone in the drawing-room, over her solitaire, when Burmin entered the room and at once inquired for Maria Gavrilovna.

"She is in the garden," replied the old lady; "go to her; I will await you here."

Burmin went, and she crossed herself and thought: "Surely, it will all be settled today."

Burmin found Masha by the pond, under a willow, all in white, a book in her hand—the typical heroine. After the first questions and answers she intentionally allowed the conversation to drop, thus increasing the mutual awkwardness to such an extent that only a determined effort could clear the situation. This is exactly what happened. Burmin, feeling most uncomfortable, declared that he had long sought an opportunity to open his heart to her and requested a few minutes' attention. Maria Gavrilovna closed her book and lowered her eyes in token of assent.

"I love you," began Burmin. "I love you passionately."

She blushed and bent her head lower still.

"I acted imprudently," he went on, "in allowing myself to drift into the sweet habit

of daily seeing and hearing you. (Here she thought of St. Preux's first letter.) Now it is too late to resist my destiny. The memory of you, your dear, matchless image, henceforth will be the torment and delight of my life. . . . But I still have a painful duty to perform: I must disclose to you a dreadful secret and raise an impassable barrier between you and myself . . ."

"It has always existed," Maria Gavrilovna broke in with bitter vehemence. "I never could be your wife . . ."

"I know," he said gently; "I know that you once loved; but death and three years of mourning . . . Dear, kind Maria Gavrilovna! do not attempt to rob me of my last drop of comfort: the thought that it might have been, if . . ."

"Stop. For God's sake, stop. You are torturing me. . . ."

"Yes. I know, I feel that you would have been mine; but . . . I am the unhappiest wretch . . . I am married."

Maria Gavrilovna gazed at him in amazement.

"Yes, I am married," Burmin went on; "have been married these three years. And I am ignorant of who my wife is, or where she is, or whether I am ever to meet her."

"What . . . what are you saying?" exclaimed Maria Gavrilovna. "How very strange. Go on. I will tell you later . . . but now go on, do."

"In the beginning of the year 1812," Burmin began again, "I was hastening to Vilna, where my regiment was quartered. One night late, I arrived at a station and ordered horses, when the most terrible snowstorm broke out and the station-master, as well as the postilions advised me to wait over. I followed their advice, but an incomprehensible unrest took possession of me; it was as though somebody were urging, pushing me on. The storm, meanwhile, did not abate. I could not stand it, and again ordered the horses, and drove out into the thick of the

storm. The driver took it into his head to follow the river, thereby shortening the way by three versts (two miles). The snow lay deep on both banks of the river, and the fellow missed the ascent to the road, so that, when we did get off the river we found ourselves in an unfamiliar locality. And still the storm did not abate. I perceived a light and ordered the postilion to drive in that direction. We came to a village in the wooden church of which there was light. The church was open; outside of the enclosure stood several sleighs; men were walking on the broad porch. 'This way. This way,' shouted several voices. I ordered the postilion to drive to the church. 'For heaven's sake, what kept you so long,' said somebody to me; 'the bride is in a swoon, the priest at his wit's end; we were just preparing to go home. Come in, be quick.' I sprang out of the sleigh without a word and entered the church; feebly lighted by two or three wax candles. A young girl was sitting

on a bench in a dark corner; another was rubbing her temples. 'Thank God,' cried this one, 'that you are here at last. My young lady is half dead.' The old priest approached me: 'Shall we begin?' 'Go ahead, Father, go ahead,' I answered absent-mindedly. They raised the girl; I thought her rather pretty. . . . In a fit of incomprehensible, unpardonable thoughtlessness I stood with her before the altar; the priest hurried along; three men and the maid supported the bride and thought only of her. The ceremony was performed to the end. 'Now kiss,' said somebody. My wife turned her pale face to me. I was going to kiss her. . . . She uttered a cry: 'It is not he! It is another!' and fell down senseless. The witnesses cast affrightened eyes on me. I turned, left the church absolutely unhindered, flung myself into my *kibitka* and shouted 'Away.'"

"My God!" exclaimed Maria Gavrilovna, "and you do not know what became of your wife?"

"I do not," answered Burmin. "I do not know the name of the village, nor remember that of the post station where I last changed horses. So little importance did I give at the time to my criminal prank that, on leaving the church, I went to sleep and woke the next morning three stages away. The serving man who then accompanied me died in the war, so that I have not even a hope to find her, whom I have so cruelly wronged and who now is so cruelly avenged."

"My God! My God!" exclaimed Maria Gavrilovna, seizing his hand; "then it was you—and you do not recognize me!"

Burmin turned pale . . . and fell at her feet . . .

The Queen of Spades[1]

By A. S. Pushkin

I

ONE night we were playing cards at the horse-guardsman's Narumof's rooms. The long winter night was gone before we knew it; we sat down to supper at five in the morning. The winnres ate with a fine appetite; the others sat before their empty plates in moody silence. Champagne, however, soon loosened the tongues and the talk became general.

"How did you fare, Surin?" inquired the host.

"Lost, as usual. It must be owned that

[1] This story is of peculiar interest from having supplied the subject matter for the *libretto* of Tchaikofsky's famous opera *The Queen of Spades*.

"The Queen of Spades" signifies secret ill-will (*The Fortune-teller's Handbook*).

I am unlucky. I never get excited, nothing ever rattles me, yet I invariably lose!"

"And you never have been tempted to risk a bolder stroke? Your firmness is a wonder to me."

"Just look at Hermann," said one of the guests, pointing to a young engineer. "Never since he was born has he touched a card, yet here he sits until five in the morning and watches us play."

"The game interests me intensely," spoke up Hermann; "but I cannot afford to sacrifice necessities in the hope of acquiring superfluities."

"Hermann is a German,—thrifty; that explains it!" remarked Tomsky. "But if anybody impresses me as a downright puzzle, it is my grandmother, the Countess Anna Fedótovna.

"Why? What of her?" cried the guests.

"What beats me," went on Tomsky, "is—why she never plays."

"Do you see anything very wonderful in

the fact that a woman eighty years of age should let cards alone?" said Narumof.

"Then you know nothing about her?"

"Not a thing. On my word!"

"Really? Well, then, listen. You must know that my grandmother, some sixty years ago, went to Paris, where she became quite the fashion. People used to run after her on the streets, to get a glimpse of *la Vénus moscovite*. Richelieu made violent love to her, and she asserts that he nearly shot himself from despair at her 'cruelty.' Ladies at that time used to play faro. One night at court she lost an extravagant sum to the Duke of Orleans. On her return home, while taking off her beauty-patches and unfastening her hoop-skirt, she told my grandfather of her loss, and ordered him to pay. Grandpa, so far as I remember, stood more or less in the position of steward to her ladyship. Anyhow he feared her as he would fire; still, on hearing of so outrageous a loss, he was beside himself, brought out his accounts, demon-

strated to her that, within six months, they had spent half a million; that, in Paris, they had neither their Moscow villa, nor their Volga lands, and refused payment point blank. Grandma boxed his ears and locked her bedroom door in token of her displeasure. Next morning she sent for her husband, in the hope that this act of domestic discipline had duly impressed him, but found him unshaken in his resolve. For the first time in her life she deigned to reason with him and explain things; she tried persuasion, condescendingly pointing out that there is as much difference in debts as there is between a prince and a candlestick-maker. All to no purpose! Grandpa, for once, rebelled. 'No' it was, and 'No' it stayed. Grandma was at her wits' end. Among her intimate acquaintances was a very remarkable man. You have all heard, of course, of the Count de Saint-Germain, of whom are told so many miraculous things. You know that he gave out that he was the Wandering Jew, and posed as the in-

ventor of the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone, etc. He was laughed at for a charlatan, and Casanova, in his *Memoirs*, brands him as a spy. Yet Saint-Germain, his mysteriousness notwithstanding, was a man of very respectable appearance and very much liked in society. My grandmother is madly in love with him to this day, and is angry if he is spoken of disrespectfully. Well, she knew that Saint-Germain handled large sums of money, she determined to have recourse to him; so she wrote to him, begging him to come to her at once, which he did, and found her in a terrible state. She descirbed her husband's barbarous conduct in the darkest colours and ended by declaring that her only hope lay in his, Saint-Germain's, friendship and chivalry. The old gentleman thought a while, then spoke: 'I might, of course, let you have this sum; but I know that you would never feel at peace with yourself until you had returned it, and I should not like to involve you in new trouble. There

is another way: you can retrieve your losses, and . . .'

" 'But, my dear Count,' my grandmother interrupted him, 'don't I tell you, that we have no money left, absolutely none, and . . .'

" 'There is no need of money for this that I am saying,' he assured her. 'Please to hear me out.'

"And he revealed to her a secret, for the possession of which we would, one and all, give a good deal."

The young gamblers redoubled their attention. Tomsky lit his pipe, took a whiff, and went on:

"That same evening my grandmother made her appearance at Versailles, *au jeu de la reine* —at the queen's card table. The Duke of Orleans held the bank. My grandmother lightly apologized for not bringing the amount of her debt, improvising a little story in explanation, and straightway began to punt against him. She picked out three cards, played them in succession, and won back all that she had lost."

"Chance!" said one of the guests.

"Possibly marked cards," suggested another.

"Hardly," gravely spoke Tomsky.

"What!" cried Narumof, "you own a grandmother who can guess three cards running, and you never turned her witchcraft to account for your own benefit?"

"Devil a bit!" replied Tomsky. "She had four sons, one of whom was my father. The other three were all desperate gamblers, and she never revealed her secret to any one of them, though it would not have come amiss to them,—or to myself either, for that matter. But this is what my uncle Ivan Ilítch told me, on his honour. The late Tchaplitsky, the same who died a pauper after gambling away something like three hundred thousand roubles, at one time was in despair. My grandmother, though, as a rule, she was severe on young men's aberrations, for some reason took pity on him. She gave him three cards, telling him to play them in a certain

order, but demanded his promise, on his honour, never thereafter to touch a card. Tchaplitsky sought out the winner, and they sat down to play. He staked fifty thousand on the first card, and won; doubled the stake on the second one, again on the third, and not only won back all that he had lost, but won a considerable sum besides. . . . However, it's time for bed."

In fact, day was just breaking. The young men finished their wine and dispersed.

II

The aged Countess —— sat in her dressing-room before the mirror, surrounded by three tiring-women. One was holding a jar of rouge, another a box with hairpins, the third a lace cap trimmed with fiery red ribbons. The Countess no longer had the slightest pretention to beauty; that had long been a thing of the past, but she retained all the habits of her youth, strictly followed the fashions of

sixty years before, and spent as much time and care as ever on her toilet. At a window, bending over an embroidery frame, sat a young girl, her ward.

"*Bonjour*, Grand'maman," said a young officer, entering the room. "*Bonjour*, Mademoiselle Lise. Grand'maman, I want to ask a favour."

"What is it, Paul?"

"Will you allow me to present to you a friend of mine, and to bring him to your ball next Friday?"

"Bring him at once to the ball, and you can present him there. Were you at ——'s last night?"

"I was. Had a fine time. Danced until five this morning. How handsome Madame Yeletsky looked!"

"Oh, my dear, what in the world can you find to admire in her? Her grandmother, now Princess Dária Petróvna, she *was* a beauty! . . . By the way, I suppose the Princess has aged a good deal, eh?"

"Aged?" lightly replied Tomsky. "Why, she has been dead these seven years."

The girl at the window looked up and made a warning sign to the young man. At that he remembered that the deaths of her contemporaries were kept secret from the old Countess, and bit his lip. But the Countess heard the news (news to her!) with the greatest equanimity.

"Dead, is she? Fancy! And I never knew! We were both called to the court as maids of honour at the same time, and when we were presented, the Empress . . ."

And for the hundredth time she told her grandson the story of that presentation.

"And now, Paul," she concluded, "help me to rise. Lizinka, where is my snuff-box?"

And the Countess, with her attendant women, stepped behind the screen, to finish her toilet. Tomsky remained alone with the young lady.

"Who is it you are going to present?" she inquired in a low tone of voice.

"Narumof. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he an officer, or a civilian?"

"Officer."

"Engineer?"

"No. Cavalry. What made you suppose he was an engineer?"

She laughed, but did not reply.

"Paul!" called the Countess from behind the screen, "send me some new novel, will you? But not of the modern kind."

"How do you mean, Grand'maman?'

"I mean a novel where the hero does not strangle either his father or his mother, and in which nobody gets drowned. I'm terribly afraid of drowned people."

"There are no such novels nowadays. Should you not like a Russian novel?"

"Why, *are* there Russian novels? Send me one, by all means."

"Excuse me, Grand'maman, I am rather in a hurry. Your pardon, Mademoiselle Lise. But why did you think Narumof was an engineer?"

And Tomsky was gone.

As soon as Liza was alone, she quit working and looked out of the window. Very soon a young officer appeared on the other side of the street, from behind a corner. A vivid blush rose to her cheeks, and she resumed her work, with her head bent low, almost down to the canvas. Just then the Countess emerged, completely dressed.

"Lízinka," she said, "order the carriage, will you; we'll take a little drive."

Liza rose and began to put away her work.

"Well, girl, are you deaf?" shouted the old lady. "Order the carriage at once."

"In a minute!" quietly replied the young lady, and ran out, into the anteroom.

A footman entered with a package of books from Prince Paul.

"Very well. Say I thank him. Liza! Liza! where on earth did you run to?"

"To dress."

"Time enough for that. You stay here. Open the first volume and read aloud."

The girl took out a book and read a few lines.

"Louder!" cried the Countess. "What's the matter with you anyway? Have you lost your voice overnight? . . . Wait. Push the footstool nearer to me. . . . Nearer! . . . Well? . . ."

The girl read two more pages. The Countess yawned.

"Put away that book. What rubbish! Send it back to Prince Paul with my thanks."

"The carriage is waiting," said Liza, looking out of the window.

"Why are you not dressed?" chid the Countess. "For ever keeping one waiting. Such a nuisance!"

The girl ran to her room. Two minutes had not gone by when the Countess began to ring her bell with all her might. The three maids rushed in at one door, and the valet at the other.

"Fine order this! No one there, to answer my bell! Go and tell Lizavéta Ivánovna I'm waiting for her."

Liza entered, dressed for the street.

"At last!" cried the Countess. "But what did you dress up like that for? Whom do you expect to fascinate? And what is the weather like today? Windy, seems to me."

"Pardon, Excellency,—it is quite still," replied the valet.

"Oh, you always talk at random! Open the *fórtochka*[1]. Of course there's a wind. A very cold one, too! Send the carriage away. Lízinka, we will stay at home; so you needn't have made yourself so smart."

"And this is my life!" thought Liza.

She was, indeed, a most unhappy creature. The stranger's bread is bitter, says Dante, and the stranger's stairs are steep,—and who should know this better, than the poor dependant of a wealthy old woman! Countess —— was certainly anything but wicked or hard-hearted; but she was self-willed, as

[1] *Fórtochka* (*ch* pronounced as in *chat*). In one window of each room, one pane is made to open for winter ventilation.

worldly society women spoiled by over-indulgence mostly are, parsimonious besides, and sunk deep in cold egotism, like all aged persons who have outlived love and live as strangers in the present. She took part in all the vanities of the great world, dragged herself to balls, where she sat in some corner, rouged and attired after the fashions of her prime, an unsightly, but unfailing ornament of every great ball-room, dutifully approached with low salutations by each arriving guest, as though in fulfilment of some time-honoured rite, to be then left to herself, unheeded and unsought. At her own house she received "the whole city" observing the strictest etiquette, but seeing no familiar faces. Her numerous retinue of servants, grown fat and white-haired in her anterooms and maids' rooms, lived at their own sweet will, ruthlessly despoiling the dying old woman. Lizavéta Ivánovna was the domestic martyr. She poured out the tea, and was for ever reproved for being too lavish with the sugar; she read

novels aloud, and was blamed for all the author's shortcomings; she accompanied her patroness in her drives, and was held responsible for the weather and the jolty pavements. She was supposed to receive a fixed monthly allowance, which was never paid but in part, yet she was expected to dress "like everybody else," which meant better than most. In society she played a pitiable part. Known to all, she was considered by none. She danced at balls only when a dancer was needed to complete a set. Ladies would take her arm whenever they wished to retire to the dressing-room for some repair to their toilet. She had her share of self-love and felt acutely the humiliations entailed by her position, and was for ever looking about her, watching for a liberator; but the young men of her world, calculating in their frivolous vanity, never dreamed of honouring her with their serious attention, although she was a hundred times more attractive than those conceited, cold-blooded society belles on whom they

danced attendance so assiduously. How often would she steal from the sumptuous, but mortally dull drawing-room and escape to her own little chamber, with its papered screen, its plain chest of drawers, its tiny looking-glass and painted bedstead, and its one tallow candle in a brass candlestick, there to cry her heart out.

One day—this happened just two days after the night on which our story opens and a week before the afternoon we last described—Liza was sitting by the window, at her embroidery frame, when, happening to glance out on the street, she saw a young engineer standing there immovable, with eyes fixed steadfastly on that very window. She immediately bent low over her work. Five minutes later she again glanced out—and there stood the young officer, on the self-same spot. Not having acquired the habit of flirting with young officers, she ceased looking out on the street, and for the next two hours or so worked steadily on, without once lifting her head,

when dinner was announced. She rose, began putting away her work, and only then casually glanced out once more—and there stood the officer. She thought this rather queer. After dinner she again approached the window with a feeling of vague uneasiness, but the officer was no longer there,—and she forgot all about him.

Two days after that, as she was stepping out of the house with the Countess, to take her place with her in the carriage, she saw him again. He was standing close to the entrance, his face hidden by his fur collar, only his black eyes gleaming. Liza was frightened, though she scarce knew why, and sat down seized with an unaccountable tremor.

Immediately on her return home she ran to the window; the officer was at his post, his eyes fixed upon her. She turned away, tormented by curiosity and agitated by feelings entirely new to her.

From this time on not a day passed that the young man, always at the same hour, did

not make his appearance under the windows of the Countess' house. A certain unspoken connection was established between the two. Sitting at her work, she would feel his approach, raise her head, and gaze at him longer and longer with every day. The young man seemed grateful. She saw, with the sharp eyes of youth, how the red blood rapidly mantled in his pallid cheeks every time that their glances met. A week had not elapsed, and she already smiled at him.

When Tomsky asked leave to present his friend, the poor girl's heart began to beat violently. However, on hearing that Narumof was not an engineer, but in the horse-guards, she regretted having, by her indiscreet question, betrayed her secret to such a flighty fellow as Tomsky.

Hermann was the son of a naturalized German, who left him a small capital. Firmly convinced of the necessity of insuring his independence, he never touched the interest, living strictly on his officer's pay and allow-

ing himself not the most trifling indulgence. Secretive and ambitious by nature, he gave his comrades no chance to twit him with his parsimoniousness. He was endowed with violent passions and a vivid imagination, but his strong will-power saved him from the aberrations common to youth. Thus, for instance, though a gambler at heart, he never touched a card, because his reason told him that his means did not allow him (to use his own words), to "sacrifice necessities in the hope of acquiring superfluities." At the same time he would sit all night long around card-tables, watching, in feverish trepidation, the various changes and turns of the game.

The story of the three cards impressed his imagination mightily, and through all that night he could not get it out of his head. "What if," he thought as he wandered about the streets next evening, "what if the old Countess should reveal her secret to me?—if she should tell me the names of those three

cards. Why should I not try my luck? . . . I might get myself introduced, win her favour, even become her lover. . . . But all this demands time, and she is eighty-seven—she may die in a week, in a day or two! . . . And the story itself. . . . Is it credible? No! thrift, moderation, and industry,—these are my three unfailing cards, this is what will increase my capital threefold, nay, sevenfold, and will procure me ease and independence!" Reasoning thus, he found himself in one of the capital's principal thoroughfares, before a house of ancient architecture. The street was crowded with carriages, which, one after another, drove up to the entrance of that same house. Out of these carriages emerged now a youthful, slender foot, now a spurred, jingling topboot, now a striped silk stocking and diplomatic buckled shoe. Fur coats and cloaks flashed past the majestic janitor. Hermann stopped to inquire of the policeman at the corner:

"Whose house is this?"

"Countess ——'s," was the answer.

A cold shiver ran through Hermann. The astounding story once more took possession of his imagination. Pacing up and down before the house, he was thinking of its owner and her wonderful power. It was late when he entered his modest quarters, and it was long before sleep came at his call. When it did, his dreams were of cards; he saw the green tables, heaps of banknotes and piles of gold. He played card after card, fearlessly turned down corners, won unceasingly, raked in the gold and stuffed the banknotes into his pockets. When he awoke, at a late hour, he gave a sigh to his departed fantastic wealth and went out for another stroll about the city, when he very soon found himself again before the Countess's house. Some unknown force seemed to draw him thither. He stopped and began to look at the windows, at one of which he beheld a dark head bent low, as it seemed, over a book, or else over some work. The pretty head was lifted, and Her-

mann saw a fresh young face and a pair of black eyes. This minute settled his fate.

III

Lizavéta Ivánovna had scarcely had time to divest herself of her wraps and bonnet, when the Countess sent for her and again ordered the carriage. While two footmen were in the act of lifting the old lady into the open door, Liza, who was standing close to the wheel, saw her engineer. He seized her hand. She was frightened out of her wits; but the young man vanished leaving a note in her hand. She concealed it inside her glove, and all through the drive neither saw nor heard a thing. It was a habit of the Countess's while driving to be continually asking questions: Who was that we just met? What is that bridge called? What is written on that sign? Today Liza answered at random and thereby angered the Countess.

"What has come to you, my dear? Are

you struck stupid of a sudden? You either don't hear me, or else you don't understand me. Thank heaven, I neither mumble nor lisp, nor am I in my second childhood that I know."

Liza was not listening. On her return home she ran at once to her room and took the note out of her glove; it was not sealed. It contained a declaration of love, was tender and respectful, as well it might be, being taken verbatim out of a German novel. But Liza did not know German and was greatly pleased.

At the same time the letter troubled her exceedingly. It was the first time that she had entered into anything like an intimate clandestine relation with a young man. His daring terrified her. She reproached herself with having acted imprudently and was at a loss what to do next: should she resign her seat at the window and, by her neglect, damp the young man's ardour, and thus cut short all further persecution? or should she return

the letter? or send a cold, decisive answer? There was no one whom she could consult, for she had neither a girl friend, nor an older and sensible one, possessed of moral authority.

She went to her small writing desk, took out paper and pen, and sat down to think the matter over. Several times she started to write—and tore up what she had written: the expressions she used seemed to her at one time too indulgent, at another too harsh. At last she succeeded in producing a few lines which contented her. "I feel assured," she wrote, "that your intentions are honourable and that you did not mean to insult me by your rash action; but not thus should our acquaintance have begun. I return your letter and hope that I shall not again have cause to complain of an undeserved lack of respect on your part."

Next day Lizavéta Ivánovna, as soon as she saw Hermann approach, rose from her seat at the embroidery frame, stepped out into the ballroom, opened the *fórtochka*, and

threw her letter out on the street, trusting to the young officer's dexterity. Hermann ran to the spot, picked up the letter, and retreated with it into the nearest confectioner's shop. There, having torn off the seal, he found his own letter and Liza's reply. It was such as he expected, and he returned home very much elated with the initial success of his intrigue.

Three days after that a note was brought to Lizavéta Ivánovna by a damsel with bold, dancing eyes, from a fashionable milliner's establishment. She opened it with some uneasiness, suspecting an application for money,—and recognized Hermann's handwriting.

"You must have made a mistake, child," said she, "this note is not for me."

"Oh, but it is," replied the pert minx with a knowing smile, which she did not trouble to conceal. "Just please to read it."

Liza ran her eye over the note. Hermann urgently demanded a meeting.

"This cannot be!" exclaimed Liza, alarmed both at the suddenness of the demand and at the means employed to convey it. "This was surely not intended for me."

And she tore the note into shreds.

"If the letter is not addressed to you, why did you tear it up?" remarked the girl. "In your place, I should have returned it to the sender."

The girl's reproof caused Liza to blush crimson, but she went on:

"Pray, my dear, never again bring me any notes. And say to him who sent you, that he ought to be ashamed of himself."

But Hermann was not to be discouraged. In some way or other Liza received letters from him every single day. They were no longer translations from the German. He now wrote them himself, inspired by genuine passion, and spoke a language entirely his own, expressive both of his inflexible desire and his ungovernable imagination. Liza no longer thought of returning them. She

eagerly absorbed them, and began to reply to them. And her letters grew daily longer and more tender. At last she threw out to him the following missive:

"Tonight there is a ball at the —— Ambassador's. The Countess will be there. We shall stay until about two o'clock. This is your chance to meet me without witnesses. As soon as the Countess departs, the servants will probably disperse; the janitor alone at such times remains downstairs in the hall; but even he will probably retire to his own den. You must come to the house at about half past eleven. Go right upstairs. Should you find any one in the anteroom, ask for the Countess. You will be told that she is out, and then you must go; there will be no help for it. But you will probably meet no one. The maids have their own room, one for them all, and usually stay in it. From the anteroom turn to your left, then walk straight ahead, to the Countess's bedroom. There, behind a screen, you will see two small doors.

The one to the right leads to the library, which she never enters; that to the left to a passage, whence a narrow winding staircase takes you up to my room."

Hermann quivered like a tiger in expectation of the appointed hour. At ten o'clock already he was standing before the house. The weather was abominable; the snow fell in big wet flakes; the street lamps burned dully; the streets were deserted. At rare intervals a cab drawn by a battered jade would creep along, the driver looking every way in search of a belated fare. Hermann had no overcoat, but felt neither wind nor snow. The Countess's carriage at last drove up to the door, and he could see the footmen supporting, almost carrying the old lady, bent double with age and feebleness, bundled up in a costly sable-lined cloak, while after her, insufficiently protected by a very light wrap, with live flowers in her hair, the Countess's ward swiftly skipped into the carriage, and the door was slammed after her. The carriage

rolled noiselessly off on the soft snow. The janitor closed the front door. The lights went out, leaving the windows in darkness. Hermann paced up and down before the deserted house, then looked at his watch by the light of a street lamp. It was twenty minutes past eleven. He stayed by the lamp, keeping his eyes on the hands of the watch, waiting for the allotted minutes to reach the half hour. At precisely half past eleven he stepped on the porch and entered the brightly lighted lower hall. It was empty. He ran up the stairs and opened the anteroom. There he saw a servant asleep under the hanging lamp, in a soiled old armchair. With a firm, light tread Hermann walked past him. The ball-room and drawing-room were in total darkness, but for a feeble ray from the lamp in the anteroom. Hermann entered the sleeping apartment. Before the corner shrine filled with ancient ikons, a lamp was dimly burning. He could plainly make out the faded damask of the armchairs and sofas with their

down-stuffed pillows, ranged in sullen symmetry along the walls, hung with Chinese tapestry. On one wall hung two portraits, painted in Paris, by Madame Lebrun. One represented a man of about forty, stout, of florid complexion, in a light green uniform, with a decoration in the form of a star on his breast; the other—a beautiful young woman with an aquiline nose, a rose in her powdered hair. Every nook and corner was crowded with china shepherds and shepherdesses; a clock by the famous Leroy, bonbonnières, fans, and all sorts of ladies' playthings, invented at the end of the eighteenth century, along with Mongolfier's balloon and Mesmerism. Hermann stepped behind the screen. There stood a small iron bedstead, to the right of which was the door leading to the library, and to the left the other door, opening into the passage. Hermann opened it and saw the narrow winding stair, which might have taken him to the poor dependent's room . . . but he turned back and entered the dark library.

Time crept on slowly. Perfect silence. The clock in the drawing-room struck twelve; then—silence again. Hermann stood leaning against the cold stove. He was calm now; his heart beat evenly, as that of a man who has resolved on something dangerous, but unavoidable. The clock struck the first, then the second hour, and now his ear caught the distant rumble of carriage wheels. In a moment all was life in the house. Servants rushed about to the sound of many voices, light filled every room. The three elderly maids hurried to their posts, and the old Countess, more dead than alive, entered and dropped into the big deep Voltaire armchair. Hermann looked through a chink in the screen. Lizavéta Ivánovna passed close by him. He heard her steps as she hastily mounted her stairs. Something like remorse stirred in his heart and was at once suppressed. He turned to stone.

The Countess began to disrobe before the mirror. The rose-trimmed lace cap came off

first, then the powdered wig, leaving bare the closely clipped, snow-white poll. Pins fell in showers around her. The silver-embroidered yellow robe slid down to her swollen feet. Hermann witnessed the repulsive mysteries of her toilet. At last she stood in her night sacque and night-cap; in this attire, more suitable to her years, she appeared less horrid and incongruous.

Like most aged persons the Countess suffered from insomnia. After undressing she sat down by the window in the big chair and dismissed the maids. The candles were carried out and the room remained, as before, plunged in the dim twilight of the one lamp burning before the shrine. The Countess sat there, slightly rocking right and left, her face the colour of yellow parchment, her pendant lips moving soundlessly. Her dull eyes expressed absolute vacuity of mind. She looked as though her rocking was not intentional or conscious at all, but produced by the action of some hidden galvanic apparatus.

Suddenly, a change came over the inanimate face: the lips ceased moving, life leapt into the eyes . . . . A man, a stranger, stood before the Countess.

"Do not be alarmed . . . for God's sake do not be alarmed!" he said in clear, low tones. "I intend you no harm. I only came to entreat a great favour of you."

The old lady gazed at him speechlessly, but did not seem to hear him. Hermann fancied she was deaf, and, bending over her, almost to her very ear, repeated his adjuration. She was silent as before.

"You can," continued Hermann, "make me happy for life, without its costing you anything. I know that you can guess three winning cards. . . ."

He paused. The Countess appeared to understand at last what was wanted of her. She seemed to be struggling for words to answer him.

"That was a jest," she brought out at last. "I swear it was a jest."

"This is no matter for jesting," retorted Hermann angrily. . "Think of Tchaplitzky, whom you helped retrieve his losses."

The Countess was visibly distressed. Her features expressed violent emotions; but she soon relapsed into her former insensibility.

"Can you," insisted Hermann, "tell me the names of those three unfailingly winning cards?"

The Countess was silent. Hermann went on:

"Why should you want to keep that secret? For whom? Your grandsons? They are wealthy as it is; besides, they don't know the value of money. Spendthrifts will not be benefited by your three cards. He who has not known how to take care of his patrimony will die poor in spite of any devilish wiles. I am no spendthrift and do know the value of money. Your three cards will not be lost on me. Well?"

He paused again, in trembling expectation of an answer. None came. He dropped on his knees.

"If ever," he said, "your heart knew the emotions of love, if you still remember its raptures, if you ever smiled at the cooing of your new-born son,—if something human ever stirred in your breast—by the feelings of a wife, a lover, a mother, by all that is sacred I beseech you, do not spurn my request, reveal your secret to me. Of what use is it to you? . . . Possibly it entails some terrible sin, the loss of eternal bliss, some devilish covenant. . . . Reflect. You are old, you have not long to live. I am willing to take the sin upon myself. Only reveal your secret to me. Think that a man's whole happiness lies in your hands—that not I alone, but my children and their children and grandchildren will bless your memory, will honour it, as a sacred thing."

Still not a word from the Countess.

Hermann rose to his feet.

"Old hag!" he muttered through his set teeth. "I'll make you speak anyhow. . . ." With that he took a pistol out of his pocket.

At this sight the Countess once more showed signs of great agitation. Her head began to wabble, and she raised one hand, as though to screen her face from the shot . . . then she fell back against the back of the chair . . . and remained motionless.

"Oh, stop your fooling!" cried Hermann, taking her hand. "For the last time I ask you: Will you name your three cards? Yes, or no?"

The Countess did not reply.

Hermann saw that she was dead.

IV

Lizavéta Ivánovna sat in her room in all her ball finery, in deep thought. On her return home she had hastily dismissed the sleepy girl who unwillingly proffered her help, saying that she would undress unassisted, and had timidly entered her room, hoping, yet dreading, to find Hermann there. Her first glance around assured her of his absence,

and she thanked her stars for the obstacle which must have prevented their meeting. She sat down without undressing, and went over in her mind all the circumstances which, in so short a time, had carried her so far. Less than three weeks had elapsed since the day when she had first beheld the young man out of the window, and already she was corresponding with him, and he had succeeded in obtaining her consent to a nightly *rendez-vous*. She knew his name only because some of his letters had been signed, had never spoken to him, nor heard his voice, nor heard him spoken of . . . until this very evening. Strange. Tonight, at the ball, Tomsky, being in a huff with the young Princess Pauline ——, who had chosen, for a change, to flirt with another man, and wishing to be revenged, had bestowed his attentions on Lizavéta Ivánovna and danced an endless mazurka with her; and all the time he had teased her about her partiality to engineers, assuring her that he knew a great deal more

than she supposed, and some of his jokes had so nearly hit the mark that she had fancied more than once that her secret was known to him.

"From whom do you know all this?" she asked him, laughing.

"From a friend of his," answered Tomsky, "a very remarkable man."

"Who is this remarkable man?"

"His name is Hermann."

She said nothing; but her hands and feet felt like ice.

"This same Hermann," continued Tomsky, "is actually a romantic person. He has the profile of Napoleon and the soul of Mephistopheles. It is my private opinion that he has at least three crimes on his conscience. . . . Why, how pale you have grown all at once!"

"I have a headache. And what did this Hermann tell you . . . or whatever his name is?"

"Hermann is disgusted with his friend, says he would act very differently in his place. Indeed I rather surmise that Hermann himself

is looking out for you; at least he listens to his friend's ravings with anything but indifference. . . ."

"But where can he have seen me?"

"Maybe at church, or out walking. Heaven knows! . . . Possibly in your room, while you slept; he is up to anything. . . ."

At this moment the conversation was broken off by two ladies, who approached Tomsky with the question: "*Oubli ou regret?*" (Oblivion or regret?) He chose one and went off with her, leaving Liza in a state of agonizing curiosity.

The lady chosen by Tomsky was Princess Pauline herself. She made time for a thorough explanation by taking him twice around the room. When Tomsky resumed his place, he was not thinking any more of either Hermann or Lizavéta Ivánovna. She did her best to renew the interrupted conversation, but the mazurka ended, and the old Countess left soon after.

Tomsky's words were mere ballroom non-

sense, but they sank deep into the young dreamer's heart. The likeness sketched by Tomsky agreed with that which she had created for herself, and this really commonplace face by turns frightened and fascinated her imagination. She sat with crossed bare arms, her flower-wreathed head bowed low on her bare breast. . . . Suddenly, the door opened and Hermann entered. She began to tremble.

"Where have you been?" she inquired in a frightened whisper.

"In the old Countess's sleeping room," he answered. "I come from there. She is dead."

"My God! . . . What are you saying?"

"And I believe," he continued, "I was the cause of her death."

Lizavéta Ivánovna looked up at him, and thought of Tomsky's words: "That man has at least three crimes on his conscience."

Hermann sat down on the window-sill next to her, and told her all.

Lizavéta Ivánovna listened to him horrified. So then, all those passionate letters, those ardent protestations, that audacious, insistent persecution,—all that was not love! Money,—that was what his soul hungered for! She could never have allayed his desire and given him happiness. The poor dependant had been nothing but the helpmate of a daring robber, of the murderer of her aged benefactress! Bitterly she wept in late, agonized repentance. Hermann looked down on her in silence. His heart was equally tortured. But it was not the tears of the poor girl, nor her wondrous loveliness in the abandonment of her grief which moved his hardened soul. He felt no remorse as he thought of the old woman lying there dead. One thing, and one only goaded him to despair: the irrevocable loss of the secret on which had rested his hopes of future wealth.

"You are a monster!" Lizavéta Ivánovna spoke at length.

"I did not wish her death," replied Hermann; "my pistol is not loaded."

Both were silent.

Morning was breaking. Liza blew out the stump of candle; a pale grey gloaming filled the room. She dried her tearful eyes and raised them to the man; he was sitting on the window-sill, his arms crossed and a heavy frown on his brow. In this attitude he reminded one wonderfully of Napoleon. The resemblance struck Liza even at this moment.

"How are you to get out of the house?" said she after a while. "I meant to take you by the secret stairs; but we should have to pass by the bedroom—I am afraid."

"Tell me how to find the secret stairs; I'll get out."

She rose, took a key out of a drawer, and gave it to Hermann with minute instructions. He pressed her cold, unresponsive hand, kissed her drooping head, and departed.

He descended the winding stairs and once more entered the Countess's bedroom. The

old lady was sitting, in death, as turned to stone, her face profoundly peaceful. Hermann stood before her and looked at her for a long moment, as though wishing to make sure of the terrible truth. At last he entered the study, groped for the door, concealed by the hangings, and found it, then began the descent down the dark stairs, agitated by strange sensations. "By these same stairs, some sixty years ago, at a like hour, in richly embroidered doublet and hair dressed *à l'oiseau royal*, pressing to his breast his plumed three-cornered hat, may have stolen some gay young gallant, now long dust, while his fair lady's heart has only just stopped beating. . . .

At the bottom of the stairs Hermann found a door, opened it with the same key, and found himself in a passage, which led him out into the street.

V

Three days after the fatal night, at ten o'clock in the morning, Hermann started for

the convent, where was to be held the funeral service for the late Countess. While conscious of no remorse, he could not quite stifle the voice of his conscience, which kept repeating: "You are the old woman's murderer." Though possessed of but little true faith, he was full of superstitions. He believed that the dead Countess could exert an evil influence over his life, and so determined to attend her obsequies, in the hope of obtaining her forgiveness.

The church was crowded. He had difficulty in pushing his way through the dense mass of people. The coffin stood on a sumptuous catafalque, under a velvet canopy. The deceased lay, her hands crossed on her breast, in a white satin robe and lace cap. Around her stood the members of her household: the men in black coats, with shoulder knots made of ribbon with her coat of arms woven into it, and lighted candles in their hands; the relatives—children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—in deep mourning.

No tears were shed; that would have been an affectation. The Countess was so old that her death could be a shock to nobody, and her relatives had long ceased to count her as one of the living. A preacher of renown spoke the funeral sermon. In simple and moving terms he pictured the peaceful demise of a righteous soul, whose life had long been but a beautiful, edifying preparation for a Christian end. "The angel of death," said the orator, "found her, watching and steeped in holy meditation, awaiting the coming of the midnight bridegroom." The service went off with sad decorum. The relatives were the first to approach the deceased for the farewell salutation. They were followed by the numerous guests, come to see the last of one who had long been a sharer in their frivolous dissipations. After them the household. Last of all a venerable, aged woman, formerly "own maid" to the Countess, of the same age as her mistress. She was supported by two young maidens.

She had not the strength to bow to the ground, but kissed the cold hand, and, alone of all the great gathering, shed a few tears.

Hermann came after her, having summoned his courage to approach the casket. He knelt and bowed his head to the ground; several minutes he lay thus on the cold stone floor strewed with fir boughs; when, at length, he raised himself, he was as the dead. He mounted the steps and bent over her. . . . And suddenly it seemed to him that she glanced up at him mockingly, with something very like a wink. He started backwards, stumbled, and fell with a crash. They raised him. At the same time Lizavéta Ivánovna was carried out in a swoon. This incident disturbed for a moment the solemnity of the gloomy rite. A dull murmur ran through the ranks of the assembly, and a long, lean chamberlain, nearly related to the deceased, whispered to his nearest neighbour, an Englishman, that the young officer was her natural son, whereupon the Englishman coolly uttered, "O—oh!"

All that day Hermann spent in extreme perturbation of mind. At his dinner, which he took in a quiet restaurant, he drank a great deal, contrary to his usually abstemious habits, in the hope of deadening his intense excitement. But the wine only heated his imagination. At home he flung himself on his bed without undressing and fell into a heavy slumber.

It was night when he awoke; his room was flooded with moonlight. He glanced at his watch; it was a quarter of three. Sleep was gone; he sat on his bed and rehearsed in his mind the old Countess's funeral.

Someone looked in at the window from the street and at once retreated. Hermann took no notice. Then he heard that someone open the door of his anteroom. He thought it was his orderly, returning from some nightly expedition—drunk, as his wont. But the step was an unfamiliar one: the slow, shuffling step of slippered feet. Now the door opened and a white-clad woman entered. Hermann

took her at first for his old nurse and wondered what could have brought her at so untoward a time. But the woman, gliding along, suddenly stood right before him, and Hermann knew her: the Countess. . . .

"I have come to thee against my wish," she said in steady tones; "but I am commanded to grant thy request. *Three*, *seven*, and *ace* will win, in this order only; but thou must not play more than one card in the twenty-four hours, and after that never play again. I forgive thee my death, on condition that thou marry my ward, Lizavéta Ivánovna."

With these words she slowly turned, shuffled to the door, and vanished. Hermann heard the entrance door slam and again saw someone looking in at the window.

Hermann was long in coming to himself. His orderly lay on the floor, asleep, and could with difficulty be aroused. He was drunk, as usual, and no sense was to be got out of him. The entrance door had been closed.

Hermann returned to his room, lit a taper, and wrote down his experience.

VI

Two fixed ideas cannot exist simultaneously in a man's moral organism, any more than two solid bodies can occupy one and the same space. "Three, seven, ace" soon obscured in Hermann's mind the image of the dead Countess. "Three, seven, ace" kept hammering at his brain and his lips kept muttering the same. If he saw a young girl, he would say: "How straight and slender she is! just like the three of hearts." Did anybody ask him what time it was? he would answer: "Five minutes of seven." A man with a paunch reminded of an ace. "Three, seven, ace" haunted his sleep, assuming every imaginable form and shape. "Three" blossomed before his eyes into a splendid hollyhock; "seven" opened into a Gothic gateway; "ace" took the form of an enormous spider.

All his thoughts were merged in one: making the best use of the secret which had cost him so dear. He began to think of resigning and of travelling. He wanted to visit the gambling houses of Paris and there to force spell-bound fortune to yield him up a treasure. Chance spared him the trouble.

An association of wealthy gamblers had been formed in Moscow under the presidency of the renowned Tchekalinsky, who had devoted his whole life to cards and was said to have at one time made millions by winning bills of exchange (I. O. U.' s) and losing cash. The experience of many years gained him the confidence of his partners, while an open house, an excellent chef, and his own cheerful disposition and courteous manner won him the good will of the public at large. He took up his residence in Petersburg. The youth of the capital rushed to him in a torrent, forgetting balls for cards and preferring the witchery of faro to the charms of flirtation. Narumof introduced Hermann. They were

taken through a series of magnificent rooms, crowded with polite attendants. There was a throng of visitors in every one. Several generals and high dignitaries were playing whist; young men were lolling on damask divans, eating ices and smoking pipes. In the drawing-room some twenty players were crowding around a long table, at which sat the host as banker. He was a man of about sixty, of most dignified appearance, enhanced by hair of silver white; his face, full and fresh-complexioned, was the image of good nature; his eyes shone with a perpetual smile. Narumof introduced Hermann. Tchekalinsky shook hands cordially, begged the new guest to make himself at home, and went on dealing.

Hermann had to wait a long time. Over thirty cards lay on the table. Tchekalinsky paused after every throw, to give the players time to make their arrangements and write down their losses; he listened to their demands with polite attention, more politely still straightened a card here and there, where a

corner had been inadvertently folded down. It was over at last. Tchekalinsky shuffled the cards and prepared to begin another deal.

"Will you permit me to play a card?" said Hermann, stretching out a hand from behind a stout gentleman who had just punted.

Tchekalinsky smiled and silently bowed in token of amiable assent. Narumof laughingly congratulated Hermann on his release from his long vow of abstinence, and wished him luck at the start.

"There goes," said Hermann, taking the chalk and writing a figure on the cloth above his card.

"How much, sir?" inquired the banker, half closing his eyes; "excuse me—I don't seem to see very well."

"Forty-seven thousand," replied Hermann.

At these words all heads instantly turned round, and all eyes were fixed upon Hermann.

"He's gone crazy," thought Narumof.

"Allow me to observe," said Tchekalinsky with his unvarying smile, "that your stake

is unusually high; no one here has ever staked more than two hundred and seventy-five at the start."

"Well," retorted Hermann, "do you accept my challenge or do you not? . . ."

Tchekalinsky bowed resignedly as before.

"I only wished to call your attention to the fact," he said, "that, being honoured by my partners' confidence, I can play only for cash. For my own part, I am convinced, of course, that your word is sufficient; but, for the sake of order in the accounts, I must request you to lay the money on your card."

Hermann took a banknote from his pocket and handed it to Tchekalinsky, who, after a cursory glance, laid it on the card.

He began to throw the cards. After a while there fell to his right a nine, to his left a three.

"Won!" cried Hermann, holding up his card.

A murmur ran through the ranks of players. Tchekalinsky frowned, but instantly summoned his habitual smile to his face.

"Is it your pleasure to receive the money now?" he inquired.

"If you please."

Tchekalinsky took several banknotes from his pocket and settled on the spot. Hermann received the money and stepped away from the table. Narumof stood as one dazed. Hermann quaffed a tumbler of lemonade and went home.

Next evening he again made his appearance. The host was keeping the bank. Hermann approached the table, where the players at once made room for him. Tchekalinsky greeted him courteously.

Hermann waited to the end of the deal, then laid down his card, and upon it laid his original forty-seven thousand and yesterday's winnings.

Tchekalinsky began to throw. A knave fell to the right of him, a seven to the left.

Hermann uncovered his card: it was a seven.

There was a general exclamation. Tchekalinsky, though visibly disturbed, counted off

ninety-four thousand roubles and handed them to Hermann, who received them with the utmost unconcern and left at once.

Next evening he again appeared punctually at the table. He was expected: generals, civilians, excellencies, high dignitaries interrupted their whist in order to watch so extraordinary a game. Young officers sprang from the divans; the attendants all crowded into the room. All pressed around Hermann. The other players kept back their cards, impatiently waiting to see what would happen. Hermann stood by the table, prepared to punt all alone against Tchekalinsky, who sat there, pale but still smiling. They each opened a new pack of cards. Tchekalinsky shuffled; Hermann cut, then laid down his card, covering it with a stack of banknotes. There was absolute silence in the room. Tchekalinsky began to deal. A queen fell to the right of him, an ace to the left.

"Ace wins!" cried Hermann and uncovered his card.

"Your queen is beaten!" gently announced Tchekalinsky.

Hermann started: before him, indeed, lay the queen of spades, instead of an ace. He could not believe his eyes: how could he have blundered so?

As he gazed, it seemed to him that the queen of spades winked at him with a wicked smile. He was struck by an extraordinary likeness.

"The old woman!" he shrieked horrified.

Tchekalinsky drew the heap of banknotes to his side of the table. Hermann stood petrified. When at last he stepped away from the table, a tumult of voices broke out. Tchekalinsky shuffled a new pack. The game proceeded in due order.

Epilogue

Hermann lost his reason. In the insane asylum, in which he is confined, he answers no questions, but keeps muttering with extraordinary rapidity "Three, seven, ace. Three, seven, ace. . . ."

Lizavéta Iványovna is married to a very nice young man, who holds some government position and has a tidy little fortune of his own; he is the son of a former steward of the old Countess. Liza is bringing up a poor relation of hers.

Tomsky is promoted to a captaincy and married to Princess Pauline.

Michail Yurievitch Lermontof

Michail Yurievitch Lermontof

THE second of the greatest Russian poets and a seer, Lermontof, was born in Moscow on the 3d of October (o.s.), 1814.

His ancestor, George Lermont, a Scotchman in the Polish service, was taken prisoner at the siege of the fortress of Biela; in 1613 he had already entered the Russian military service and was given an estate in the province of Kostroma. He drew his pedigree from Thomas the Rhymer, an ancient Scotch king and poet, who bore the name of Lermont and has been sung by Walter Scott.

The poet's father was a poor captain of infantry and owned a small estate in the province of Tula, adjoining that of the wealthy widow Arsenief, born Stolypin, whose daughter fell in love with him and married him

against her mother's will. The marriage was not a happy one, and she died in 1817, leaving an only child, the future poet. His grandmother, who detested her son-in-law, took away the boy to an estate she had in the province of Penza, where he was brought up under the supervision of two tutors, a Frenchman, and an Englishman of the name of Windson. After two years in the University of Moscow, where he learned to worship Pushkin and Schiller, Lermontof entered the School of Cavalry, and, in 1834 was admitted, with the rank of cornet, into one of the most brilliant cavalry regiments, in which his cousin Stolypin served.

His first poem was published in 1835. His scourging ode on Pushkin's death (1837) was looked on as a revolutionary appeal, and the poet was transferred to another regiment and sent to the Caucasus, but allowed to return thence in 1840. Then he fought a duel with the son of the French Ambassador, Barante, for which offence he was transferred

to an infantry regiment, then in active service on the Caucasus. In the expeditions into Greater and Lesser Tchetchnia he was reported as "a smart officer gifted with a sure eye, and of reckless bravery."

On the 15th of June (o.s.), 1841, he was killed in a duel at Piatigorsk on the Caucasus, when barely twenty-seven. He had, in a poem written in 1831, not only predicted his own death, but described the circumstances attending it.

Lermontof is the greatest poet of "the Beyond" that Russia has had, the poet of the soul freed from earthly bonds, the poet of the Demon suffering and seeking earthly love. He says of himself: "No, I am not Byron, I am another of the elect, unknown as yet; like him a world-hunted wanderer, but with a Russian soul."

S. N. SYROMIATNIKOF.

A Travelling Episode

By M. Lermontof

TAMAGNE is the nastiest little hole of all the seashore towns in Russia. I was all but starved to death there; and, as if that were not enough, they tried to drown me. I arrived there in my light open post-wagon late one night. The *yamschik* (post-boy) stopped his weary *troika* before the one stone house at the entrance of the town. The sentry, a Black Sea Cossack, the moment he heard the tinkling of the bell, shouted, half asleep, in a fierce tone of voice: "Who goes there?" A sergeant and a corporal came out to me. I explained to them that I was an officer, on my way to join the army at the front, and demanded to have quarters assigned to me. The corporal took us all round the town. Whatever hut we stopped at

proved to be occupied. It was cold; I had had three sleepless nights—I was getting cross.

"Take me anywhere at all, you scamp," I cried; "to the devil if need be, so you get me to some place at last."

"We might try one more," replied the man dubiously, scratching the back of his head; "but your honour won't like it; it isn't just canny."

Not understanding the exact meaning of the word, I ordered him to march ahead, and a long peregrination among dirty lanes and alleys, on both sides of which I saw nothing but dilapidated fences, brought us to a small hut on the very edge of the shore.

A full moon shone brightly on the reeded roof and whitewashed walls of my prospective resting-place; in the yard, fenced in by a cobblestone enclosure, there stood, leaning over to one side, another hovel, older and smaller than the first. The shore fell sheer off to the sea almost from the very foot of

its walls, and down there the dark blue waves splashed against the strand with an unceasing murmur. The moon serenely looked down on the restless element, submissive withal to her sway, and I was enabled by her light to make out, far away, two ships, whose black rigging, looking like cobwebs at this distance, stood out immovable against the pale line of the horizon. "Vessels in the harbour," thought I; "tomorrow I'm off to Gelendjik."

I ordered the Cossack of the line attached to my personal service to take down my trunk and dismiss the driver, then called for the owner; no answer; I knocked, still no answer. What could be the meaning of this? At length a lad of about fourteen crept out of the entrance passage.

"Where's the master?"

"Isn't any."

"What? No master at all?"

"None at all."

"The mistress, then?"

"Went off to the village."

"Then who's to open the door for me?" said I, at the same time giving it a kick. It opened of itself. A whiff of damp air blew in my face. I lit a match and held it under the lad's nose: the light showed me two white eyes. He was blind, entirely blind from birth. He stood before me, immovable, and I began to examine his features.

I confess to a strong prejudice against all blind, deaf, dumb persons, cripples, hunchbacks, etc. I have noticed that there invariably exists some strange correlation between the outer man and the soul; as though, in losing one of its organs, the soul also lost some feeling.

So I began to examine the blind boy's features; but what can you read on an eyeless countenance? Long I gazed at him with involuntary compassion, when, of a sudden, a scarce perceptible smile flitted across his thin lips, and produced on me, I know not why, a most unpleasant impression. A suspicion flashed across my mind, that he might

not be as blind as he seemed; vainly I strove to persuade myself that a cataract is hardly a thing that can be shammed; besides, why should he? for what purpose? But what was I to do? I am frequently given to prejudices.

"Are you the mistress's son?" I asked at length.

"No."

"Who, then, are you?"

"A poor infirm orphan."

"Has the mistress any children?"

"No. There was a daughter, but she went off, beyond the sea, with a Tatar fellow."

"What kind of a Tatar?"

"Devil a bit I know. A Crimean he was, a boatman from Kertch."

I entered the hut: two benches and a table, with a huge coffer near the oven made up all its furnishing. Not an ikon on the wall—an evil sign. Through a broken pane the wind came rushing in from the sea. I got a waxen candle-end out of my trunk and, having lit it, began to unpack my things, stood

my sword and gun up in a corner, laid my pistols on the table, and spread my *burka*[1] on one bench, while the Cossack spread his on the other; in ten minutes more he was snoring; but I found no sleep: the boy with the white eyeballs kept dancing before me.

About an hour may have passed in this way. The moonlight, entering the window, played on the earthen floor. All at once, a shadow flitted across the bright bar intersecting it. I half raised myself and looked at the window; someone again ran past it and vanished, heaven knows where. I could not imagine anybody running down that bluff, yet there did not seem to be any other way. I rose, got into my tunic, buckled on my belt with the dagger attached to it, and quietly

[1] The *burka* is a long and ample cloak (down to the feet) of felted cloth, with thick sheep's wool worked in on the outside. If laid out flat it would look simply like a circular garment with a hole cut out for the head and neck. The *burka*, exceedingly warm and impenetrable to rain or fog, is worn by Cossacks and all the Caucasus tribes.

stole out of the hut; the blind boy was coming straight at me. I stepped aside and stood quite still against the fence, while the boy, with an assured but cautious gait, walked past me. He carried some sort of bundle under his arm, and, turning towards the harbour, began to descend by a narrow and steep pathway. "On that day the dumb shall speak and the blind see," thought I, following him at such a distance as not to lose sight of him.

Clouds, meanwhile, were mantling the moon, and a mist was rising from the sea, hardly allowing a gleam of the lantern lit at the prow of the nearest ship to pierce it; along the shore glistened the spray of the rollers, which threatened to flood it at any moment. Descending with difficulty I threaded my way down the steep incline, and this is what I saw: the blind boy paused after reaching the bottom, then turned to the right; he walked so near the water, it seemed as though the next wave must get him and bear

him away; but, judging by the surety with which he stepped from one boulder to another and avoided the holes, this was evidently not his first excursion of the kind. At last he stopped, seeming to listen, squatted down on the ground, and laid the bundle by his side. Hiding behind a protruding cliff, I observed every movement. After a few minutes a white figure approached from the opposite side and sat down beside the boy. The wind from time to time brought me parts of their conversation.

"Well," said a woman's voice, "it's blowing hard. Yanko won't come."

"Yanko is not afraid of a gale," replied the boy.

"The fog is growing denser, too," resumed the woman's voice in tones of sadness.

"In a fog it is easier to pass the ships," was the answer.

"What if he should get drowned?"

"Well, what if he should? You wouldn't have a new ribbon for church next Sunday."

A silence now ensued. One thing struck me; in speaking to me the boy had used the Ukrainian dialect, while now he spoke the purest Russian.

"You see, I was right," again began the blind boy, clapping his hands. "Yanko fears neither sea, nor winds, nor fogs, nor coast guards. Just listen: this is not the water splashing—it can't fool me; that's Yanko's long oars."

The woman sprang to her feet and peered into the distance with every sign of uneasiness.

"You are dreaming," she said. "I see nothing."

I must say, neither did I, hard as I strove to make out in the distance anything like a boat. This suspense lasted some ten minutes. Then, between two mountainlike waves, there appeared a black dot, now larger, now again smaller. Now slowly lifted to the crest of waves, now swiftly plunging into the trough below, a boat was approaching the shore. None but the most daring mariner

would, on such a night, have ventured, twenty versts into the channel, and none but the most urgent business could have induced him thereto. With an involuntary quickening of the heart I gazed at the luckless boat; now diving like a duck, now, with a swift flourish of her oars, as of wings, leaping out of the abyss amid spume and spray; and now I thought she surely must be flung against the shore and dashed to pieces; but she lithely turned her side to the onset and bounded unharmed into the little cove. A man of middle height in a sheepskin cap, such as Tatars wear, sprang on land; he waved his hand, and all three began to drag something out of the boat; the load was so heavy, that I wonder to this day she did not sink under it. With each a big bundle on their backs, they started along the shore, and I soon lost sight of them. It was time for me to go back; but I confess that all these strange happenings disturbed me, and I could hardly wait for the morning.

My Cossack was greatly astonished when, on waking, he saw me completely dressed. I did not tell him the reason, though. I stood for some time at the window, admiring the azure sky, studded with stray bits of ragged clouds, the purple line of Crimea's distant shore, ending in a cliff, surmounted by the white tower of a lighthouse—then walked to the fort of Phanagoria, to find out from the commanding officer at what time I should start for Gelendjik.

But alas, he could tell me nothing positive. The ships in the harbour were all either coast-guard vessels or traders, which had, as yet, not even begun loading.

"In three or four days," he said, "the packet boat may come in; then we shall see."

I went home gloomy and cross. At the entrance I was met by my Cossack; he looked scared.

"Things look bad, your honour," he announced.

"Indeed they do, boy. God knows when we shall get away from here."

He bent down closer to me, getting more excited, and said:

"It is uncanny here. Today I met the sergeant; we are acquainted, he was in my detachment last year. When I told him where we were stopping, he said: 'It's uncanny there. The people are not right. . . .' And really now, what kind of a blind boy is this? He goes about everywhere by himself, to market, for bread, for water; they seem to be quite used to it here."

"Well, and did the mistress show up, at least?"

"In your absence there came an old woman and her daughter."

"Daughter? Why, she has no daughter."

"Heaven knows then, who she is, if not her daughter. But there's the old woman now, sitting in the hut."

I went in. There was a hot fire in the oven, and dinner was being cooked in it; a pretty

luxurious one for poor people. To all my inquiries the old woman replied that she was deaf, could hear nothing. What was I to do with her? I turned to the blind boy. He was crouching before the oven, feeding the fire with dry sticks.

"See here, you blind imp," I said, taking hold of his ear, "tell me, where did you betake yourself last night with that bundle, eh?"

The fellow all at once burst into tears, with shrieks and moanings.

"Where did I go? Why, nowhere . . . with a bundle? What bundle?"

The old woman for once did hear and began to grumble:

"The idea. Inventing lies just to bother a poor unfortunate. What did he ever do to you?"

I went out, disgusted, but firmly resolved to get at the key of the mystery.

I wrapped my *burka* around me and sat down by the fence on a big stone, letting my

eyes roam over the distance. Before me stretched the sea, still restless after the night's tempest, and its monotonous roar, not unlike the confused hum of a city settling down to sleep, recalled to my mind other days, bore my thoughts away to the north, to our cold capital. Stirred by memories, I forgot myself. . . . An hour may have passed in this way, possibly more. . . . Suddenly something like a song struck on my ear. It was a song all right, sung by a woman's fresh young voice. But where did it come from? . . . I listened intently. The melody was tuneful, now slow and sad, now quick and lively. I looked around me—not a soul within sight. I listened again—it was as though the sounds fell from heaven. I looked up: there, on the roof of my hut, stood a girl in a striped gown, her hair loose, a veritable Undine. Shading her eyes with her hand from the sun, she was gazing intently into the distance, now laughing and talking to herself, now resuming her song.

I remember that song word for word.

Lo, as freedom free,
O'er the waters green
Swiftly sweep the ships,
The white-sailed.

And amidst those ships
Speeds my little skiff,
My unrigged, two-oared boat,
Skimming the deep.

If the storm should play,
Then those brave old ships
Will raise up their wings,
Scatter o'er the sea.

To the seas I'll pray,
With a low, low bow:
"Touch thou not, O angry sea,
My little boat.

"For it bears a load
Of most precious things,
Steered through the murky night
By a daring hand."

I unconsciously remembered that I had heard the same voice in the night; I paused to think a minute, and when I looked up at the roof once more, the girl was gone. All at once she ran past me, humming some other

tune, and, snapping her fingers, ran into the hut and joined the old woman and straightway they began to quarrel. The old woman was angry, the girl laughed boisterously. The next minute my Undine ran out again, skipping along, and, stopping before me, looked fixedly in my eyes, as though wondering at my being there, then turned scornfully away and walked off to the harbour. Nor was this the end of it. All day long she was around; the singing and skipping never let up a minute. Strange creature that she was. Her face showed no signs of insanity; on the contrary, she eyed me with alert shrewdness in her gaze, and her eyes seemed endowed with some kind of magnetic power, and every time appeared to expect an answer. But, the moment I began to speak, she would run away, throwing me a teasing smile.

Decidedly, never had I seen a woman like her. She was far from being a beauty; but I have ideas of my own on the subject of beauty, too. There was race in the girl,

plenty of it. Now race in women, as blood in horses, is a great thing; this is a discovery due to young France. It (race, I mean, not France) is mostly apparent in the gait, the hands and feet; the nose, especially, is of very great importance. A regular nose is rarer in Russia than a small foot. My songstress appeared not more than eighteen. Her unusually flexible form, an inclination of the head peculiar entirely to herself, her long fair tresses, a certain golden-tinted bloom on the slightly sunburned skin of her neck and shoulders, and, above all, her regular nose—all this together made up an exceedingly—to me—fascinating whole. Although I read in her oblique looks something wild and suspicious, although her smile had in it something indefinite, yet such is the force of prejudice, her regular nose had me crazy. I fancied I had found Goethe's Mignon, that whimsical creation of his German imagination; and, truly, the two had much in common; the same swift passing from greatest restlessness

to absolute quietude, the same enigmatical speeches, the same skippings and weird songs.

Towards evening I detained her at the door and entered into conversation with her.

"Tell me, my beauty," I began, "what were you doing this morning on the roof?"

"Looking which way the wind blew."

"What did you want to know that for?"

"What way the wind comes, that way comes happiness."

"Did you, then, think to entice happiness with your singing?"

"Where there is singing, there happiness comes to roost."

"And suppose it's sorrow that hears your call?"

"Well, it may be ill fortune instead of good; but then again, after ill fortune good fortune is not so very far away."

"Who taught you that song?"

"No one. Things come to me, then I sing. It is for them as can hear; and those as can't, my song is not for them."

"And what may be your name, my singing bird?"

"Them as christened me know."

"And who did christen you?"

"How should I know?"

"How secretive you are. All the same I have found out something about you." (There was no change in her face, no twitching of the lip; it was as though she were not concerned at all.) "I know that you went to the strand last night." And I gravely told her all I had seen, thinking to put her out of countenance. Nothing of the kind. She broke into immoderate laughter.

"You may have seen, but you don't know much,—and what you do know, better keep under lock and key."

"And what if the fancy took me to tell the commandant at the fort?" saying which I put on a very serious, even stern mien.

She suddenly gave a leap, burst into song, and vanished, like a bird frightened out of a bush. My last words were very much out of

place. I did not then realize their importance, but it was not long before I had occasion to repent of them.

As soon as it was twilight I ordered my Cossack to set our campaign-kettle to boil, lit a candle, and sat down by the table to smoke my travelling pipe. I was finishing my second glass of tea, when the door creaked and I heard a light rustle of steps and skirts behind me; I started and turned round: it was she, my Undine. Quietly and silently she sat down opposite to me and fixed her gaze on me—and that glance somehow seemed to me wonderfully tender; it put me in mind of those other glances, which, in days gone by, used to play such havoc with my life. She seemed to expect some question, but I kept still, unaccountably disturbed in my whole being. Her face was covered with a dull pallor, which betrayed inner agitation; her hand was aimlessly wandering over the table, and I noticed a slight tremor in it; her breast now rose high, now appeared to

hold in the breath. I began to find this comedy tiresome, and I was about to break the silence in the most prosaic manner, simply by offering her a glass of tea, when, suddenly, she sprang up and threw her arms around my neck, and a moist, resounding kiss burned my lips. A darkness obscured my sight, my brain reeled; I pressed her in my arms with all the force of youthful passion; but she, with serpentine agility, slipped out of my embrace, whispering in my ear: "Tonight, when all are asleep, descend to the strand"—and was out of the room as an arrow shot from the bow. Outside, she knocked over the kettle, and the candle which was burning on the floor. "What a demon of a girl!" exclaimed my Cossack, who had just made himself comfortable on some straw and was preparing to warm himself with what was left of the tea. Then only I came to my senses. Two hours later, when all was hushed about the harbour, I roused my Cossack: "If I fire my pistol," said I to him, "run down to the strand."

He stared at me and answered mechanically, "Very well, your honour." I stuck my pistol in my belt, and went. She was awaiting me at the edge of the bluff. She was clothed more than lightly; a large shawl girded her slender form.

"Follow me," she said, taking my hand, and we began the descent. That I did not break my neck, is a mystery to me. We turned to the right and took the same path along which I had watched the blind boy's movements. The moon had not risen yet; only two little stars, like the guiding flames of lighthouses, twinkled on the dark blue vault. Heavy waves rhythmically and evenly rolled up one after another, scarcely lifting the solitary skiff moored at the shore.

"Get in," said my companion.

I hesitated. I am not partial to sentimental excursions on the sea; but there was no time to retreat. The girl jumped lightly into the boat; I followed, and, before I knew it, we were afloat.

"What is the meaning of this?" I inquired angrily.

"It means," replied she, forcing me down on the bench and flinging her arms around my body in a tight embrace, "it means that I love you."

Her cheek was pressed against mine, and I felt her hot breath on my face. Suddenly, there was the noisy splash of a heavy object falling into the water. I quickly felt my belt —my pistol was gone. Then a terrible suspicion arose in me, the blood rushed to my head. I looked around me; we were about forty yards from the shore, and I cannot swim. I tried to push her from me; she clutched my clothes like a cat, and a sudden violent shove nearly had me in the water. The boat rocked, but I kept my balance, and now began a desperate struggle; rage gave me strength, but I soon became aware that I was no match for my adversary in agility.

"What is it you want?" I shouted, squeezing her slender fingers till they cracked; but

she made no sound, her serpentine nature stood the torture.

"You saw . . . you will tell," she gasped, and, by a superhuman effort, flung me across the side of the boat; we both hung half over, her hair touching the water. It was a critical moment. I braced myself with one knee against the bottom of the boat, took hold of a braid of her hair with one hand and seized her throat with the other; she let go of my clothes, and in an instant I had thrown her overboard.

It was pretty dark; her head showed once or twice amid the foam, then I saw nothing more.

At the bottom of the boat I found half of an old oar, and somehow, after long efforts, managed to land. Threading my way along the shore towards my hut, I involuntarily kept looking in the direction of the spot where, the night before, the blind boy had awaited the coming of the nightly visitor. The moon now rode high in the sky, and I thought I saw a white figure sitting on the strand. I stole that way, actuated by curiosity, and,

crouching low in the grass, advanced my head a little, so that, from the top of the cliff, I could see all that was going on below, and I was not too much astonished, indeed rather glad, when I recognized my Undine. She was pressing the water out of her long hair, her wet, clinging garment betraying the outline of her splendid bust. Soon a boat appeared in the distance and rapidly approached. Just as yesterday a man in a Tatar cap stepped out of it; but his hair was cut after the Cossack fashion, and a big knife was stuck in his leather belt.

"Yanko," she cried, "all is lost."

Their further conversation was carried on in tones so low I could make out nothing.

"Where is the blind boy?" Yanko inquired at last, raising his voice.

"I sent him . . ." she answered.

A few minutes later the boy made his appearance, loaded with a heavy sack, which they proceeded to stow into the boat.

"Listen, fellow," said Yanko "Guard that place well—you know which I mean;

there are precious wares there. . . . Tell —— (I could not make out the name) that I won't serve him any longer; business is getting bad, he shan't see me again; it's too risky now; I'm going to look for work somewhere else, and he won't find another such daredevil fool to work for him. And tell him, if he paid better, Yanko would not leave him; as for me, there is room for me wherever winds blow and waters roar." After a brief pause he went on. "She is going with me; she can't stay here after this. And tell the old woman, it's high time she should die; she is overstaying her time, there's a limit to all things. As for us, she'll never see us any more."

"And what of me?" plaintively whimpered the boy.

"What use are you to me?" was the brutal reply.

Meanwhile my Undine had leapt into the boat, and now she waved her hand to her companion. He thrust something into the

blind boy's hand, saying: "There, buy yourself some gingerbread."

"Is that all?" protested the boy.

"Well, here's some more," and a coin fell clanking on the rocks. The boy did not pick it up.

Yanko stepped into the boat. The wind blew from the shore; they raised the little sail and were swiftly borne out to sea. For quite a while the sail gleamed white under the moonbeams from amidst the dark billows; the blind boy sat on and on, and suddenly I heard something like a sob; he actually wept —wept a long, long time. . . . I felt sorry for him. And what need had fate to throw me into this peaceful nest of honest smugglers? Like a stone, suddenly cast into a quiet pond, I disturbed the even tenor of their existence, and, like that stone, very nearly went to the bottom myself.

I went home. In the small entrance passage a burned-down candle was sputtering on a wooden platter, and my Cossack, in

spite of orders, was sleeping soundly, his gun held tight in both hands. I let him alone, took the candle, and entered the hut. Alas, my travelling casket, my silver-mounted sword, my Daghestan dagger, a friend's gift—everything was gone. Then I guessed what it was that accursed blind boy was hauling. I roused my Cossack rather discourteously, I'm afraid, gave him a scolding, grumbled a bit, but there was nothing to be done. And would I not have looked ridiculous, complaining to my superior officers of having been robbed by a blind boy and all but drowned by a girl of eighteen! Thank God, next morning an opportunity offered to leave Tamagne, and I did. What became of the old woman and that poor blind rascal, I never knew. And what, after all, did the joys and sorrows of men matter to me, an army officer travelling on government business with a government order for post-horses? . . .